

Ghosh, Manmathanath  
Memoirs of Kali Prossunno  
Singh

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MEMOIRS OF  
LI PROSSUNNO SINGH  
BY  
MANMATHANATH GHOSH







Life of Gria Chunder Ghose, Founder  
and First Editor of the "Hindoo  
Patron" and the "Bangalee," by one  
who knew him. Edited by his  
Grandson Manmathanath Ghosh.

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Chunder Ghose Edited by his  
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OF  
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BY  
MANMATHANATH GHOSH,  
M.A., F.S.S., F.R.E.S.

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"One crowded hour of glorious life

Is worth an age without a name."

Sir Walter Scott.

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CALCUTTA

1920

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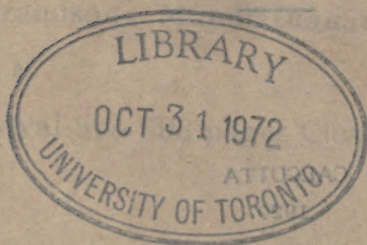
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## PREFACE

AN apology is scarcely needed for this presentation in an English dress of the monograph on Kali Prossunno Singh which I wrote in Bengali and published about five years ago. The name of the illustrious translator of the *Mahabharat* and author of *Hutum Panchar Naksha* deserves to be more widely known than it is outside the country of his birth, and as English is now the prevailing language among the cultured classes all over India and the greater portion of the world besides, an English edition of his biography seems to be the best means of giving a greater publicity to his name and fame. The time, too, is opportune ; for, the semi-centenary of his death takes place to-day ; and, by way of refreshing the memory of his noble exertions for the moral and intellectual advancement of his countrymen, a recapitulation of his career cannot be unacceptable to the public at the present juncture. Some fresh materials have been collected by me since I published the Bengali edition, and I have incorporated them in their proper places in the present volume, which, I trust, will be received by the public with as much favor as the original work in Bengali.

MANMATHANATH GHOSH

1/3, Krishnaram Bose St.,  
Calcutta, July 24, 1920.

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Kali Prossunno Singh



MEMOIRS  
OF  
KALI PROSSUNNO SINGH

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CHAPTER I.

BOYHOOD.

WHEN we look round at other countries of the civilised world and read their history, the strangest thing that greets our gaze is the sight of hoary-headed octogenarians devotedly working in every department of the wide field of human action and enterprise with all the fire, energy, hopefulness and perseverance of youth, in order to compass their noble aims. We find veteran statesmen setting at naught the infirmities of old age, and after repeated defeats sustained in their life-long struggle for securing some just rights and privileges to the nation, girding up their loins again to enter on a fresh campaign for the same worthy ends, and either coming out victorious

or laying down their lives for the cause in which they fought, but not until they have inspired younger men with their own ardour and enthusiasm so as to pave the way for the attainment of those ends by a succeeding generation. We find old scientists engaged in minutely observing and investigating the phenomena of nature with the curiosity of a child and the skill of an expert, and either astonishing the world with some wonderful discovery or laying down their lives on the eve of one, after handing over the torch of knowledge to their successors and inspiring them with a love of science which impels them onward on the new paths pointed out to them till success rewards their labors. We find venerable religious teachers engaged with all the ardour of youth in the sacred work of awakening the religious instincts of their fellowmen and imparting new life to their moral nature, some in their own country, and others, thousands of miles away. We find grey-headed men of letters engaged in the creation of new forms of literature to elevate humanity and hold new ideals before its eyes. And we find learners of a younger generation, reverently taking their lessons at the feet of these experienced and venerable leaders of

men, and thus arming themselves for the battle of life with weapons ready-made for them. The streams of thought and action originating from these hoary-headed men of genius and learning are always kept running by their successors and never allowed to stagnate, but, on the contrary, are increased in volume and in force. Thus the work begun by one man is carried forward by another, and the fountains of thought coming out from one generation gradually gain fulness and force in another, and are transformed into mighty rivers.

But when we cast our eyes on this ill-fated country of ours and read its history in the making, we find indeed that there is no dearth of men of talents and genius, and that at an age when, in other countries, men are still engaged in learning and gaining experience and are considered too young to develop fully their intellectual powers,—in our country, men of genius and originality have already reached almost the highest point of intellectual development and distinction. Before, however, they have attained the zenith of their career, the cruel hand of death has put an untimely end to their labors. The beautiful dawn, resplendent with the glory of the rising sun,

which gave promise of a dazzling noon and a gorgeous sunset, is suddenly enveloped by the densest clouds darkening the horizon. Recall to your minds the lives of Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee, Grish Chunder Ghose and Kissory Chand Mittra who, during the dark days of the Sepoy Mutiny and the Indigo riots, rendered through their powerful pen and political foresight, invaluable services to the country by inducing the Government on the one hand to adopt a just, merciful and humane policy, and pointing out to the people on the other hand the paths of strict loyalty and constitutional agitation. Remember the lives of Kristo Das Pal and N. Ghose, who distinguished themselves in the field of politics and journalism in more recent times. All these men were cut off in the prime of life leaving a void which nobody had been trained to fill. The youths of our country had no opportunity of sitting at the feet of their grey-headed grandsires and listening to the stirring tales of their great achievements, their victories and their defeats, and of catching inspiration therefrom and imbibing that spirit of ambition and enterprise which is at the root of all successful human activity. The skill and experience gained



by their predecessors during their strenuous lives were never transmitted to them and were therefore lost to the country. The new generation of workers had to begin *de novo* and acquire skill and experience from their own unaided efforts, and thus it is that they have not been able to keep up the activities of national life set in motion by their predecessors—far less to increase their volume or accelerate their motion. In short, they have been unable to fill the place of their ancestors. New paths are being struck out here and there by men of genius, only to be abandoned by the next generation. This is unfortunate for our country, as it retards all progress.

Think of Keshub Chunder Sen and Swami Vivekanand, whose trumpet-voice awakened echoes in every part of the civilized world and whose teachings illuminated the minds of thousands of men and women. Are the movements which owed their origin to their genius still alive and growing? Did not both of them pass away in their prime before they had reached the goal of their aims and aspirations and had sufficiently matured their lofty schemes and imparted to them stability and permanence?

Think of Dinobundhoo Mitter, who by the

power of his genius inaugurated a new epoch in the history of Bengali Drama. Think of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, one of the greatest poets that Bengal has ever produced,—of Surendra Nath Majumdar, the popular poet who sang the glory of womanhood,—of Rajani Kanta Gupta, the famous historian of the Sepoy War,—of Balendra Nath Tagore, the talented essayist,—of D. L. Roy, Kali Prossunno Kavyabisharad and Rajani Kanta Sen, whose songs found an echo in every patriotic heart. All of them were snatched away by untimely death ! The message which they came to deliver has remained unsaid—the song which they began to sing has suddenly ceased.

The remarkable man, a short account of whose life and work we desire to present to our readers, died too young to enable us to estimate aright the greatness of his soul and the power of his intellect. But the life story of the extraordinary man who, during the short span of twenty-nine years, was able to leave behind him 'footprints on the sands of time'—by his selfless devotion to his country's cause, by his labors to enrich the literature of his mother tongue in defiance of the prevailing fashion among his contemporaries to neglect and disdain it, by his efforts to resuscitate and foster

the Hindu Drama and Dramatic art, and by the republication, at an enormous expense, of ancient religious books composing the Hindu Shastras and dissemination of the teachings contained therein among the masses of his countrymen,—certainly deserves careful study, however incomplete it may be.

It is a curious fact that we have not yet learnt to preserve any record of the lives of the great men of our country. While we are engaged in laborious researches for the discovery of historical truths,—in hot discussions for ascertaining the date of birth of Krittibas or the place of birth of Kalidas,—in palming off on the ignorant public, as our own original discoveries, the results of the laborious researches of European antiquarians, or in attempting to establish our superiority over the latter by ridiculing the conclusions arrived at by them,—we scarcely trouble ourselves to ascertain when and where our own ancestors lived and flourished. We pride ourselves upon the knowledge of the modes of life of men who lived in the time of Chandra Gupta or Vikramaditya, Asoka or Kanishka,—how far they were civilised, how far their knowledge and learning extended, what manners and customs were in

vogue in their time, what religious creed they followed, and so on,—but we are profoundly ignorant, and do not consider it necessary to inform ourselves, of the modes of life of our own nearer or more remote ancestors, or the state of society in their time.

The dates of birth and death of Kali Prossunno Singh, to whom Bengali literature owes so much, have not been recorded by any historian of that literature ;—no attempt has even been made to ascertain them. It appears from old newspapers that Kali Prossunno died at the age of twenty-nine in the year 1870. The date of his birth may therefore be put down as 1841. Pandit Krishna Kamal Bhattacharyya, who was born in 1840, says that he and Kali Prossunno were about the same age.

Kali Prossunno was born in a very old and respectable family. His great-grandfather Santiram Singh amassed a large fortune by serving as a Dewan under Sir Thomas Rumbold and Mr. Middleton at Murshidabad and Patna. He acquired an extensive Zemindary in Orissa. It appears that the Singhs of Jorasanko had attained a high position and exercised great influence on the Hindu society of the time. Santiram was an



orthodox Hindu, and spent the greater part of his time in devotion and worship. He dedicated a temple to *Siva* at Benares.

Dewan Santiram left two sons,—Pran Krishna and Joy Krishna. Joy Krishna was one of the founders of the Hindoo College and we glean from a discourse, read by Kissory Chand Mittra at the Twentieth Hare Anniversary Meeting held on the 2nd June 1862, on *the Hindoo College and its Founder*, that he was also one of the first Native Directors of that College. His name also appears in the memorial tablet erected in the Presidency College “to commemorate the liberality and public spirit of the donors who mainly contributed to the founding of the Hindoo College.” Joy Krishna left only one son,—Nanda Lall (better known as Satu Singh) who was the father of Kali Prossunno.

Nanda Lall appears to have inherited his father's public spirit and generous instincts. We find from Peary Chand Mittra's interesting *Biographical Sketch of David Hare*, that he took an active part in the movement headed by Rajah Krishna Nath Roy of Cossimbazar in 1841 to perpetuate the memory of that apostle of Native Education. We find him also assisting Maharshi

Debendra Nath Tagore in establishing in 1845 the '*Hindoo Hitarthi Bidyalaya*,' the object of which was to counteract the proselytising influence of the Missionary institutions, which had been causing considerable alarm to Hindu guardians. Nanda Lall was appointed a member of the Managing Committee of the School of which Raja Radhakanta Deb was the President.

Nanda Lall died very young. Hara Chunder Ghose—then a Judge of the Calcutta Small Cause Court—was appointed guardian of the person and property of the infant Kali Prossunno. Under his able superintendence, the ancestral properties of Kali Prossunno were considerably improved.

In his boyhood, Kali Prossunno received lessons in Bengali, English and Sanskrit. As a boy, he was very restless and full of mischief, but was smart and quick-witted. The following interesting anecdote which appeared in an old issue of the *Shomeprakash* will give the readers an idea of Kali Prossunno's ready wit:—One day, when he was apparently listening with deep attention to the lecture of his teacher, he suddenly gave the boy seated next to him a smart slap on the head. When the boy complained to the teacher, Kali Prossunno said, with an air of

assumed gravity, 'Sir, I am a Singha (Lion) by race, and could not therefore altogether forsake my leonine nature, and so I gave him a slap.'

Babu Pratapa Chandra Ghosha—the famous author of the *Bangadhipa Parajaya*, and a class-fellow of Kali Prossunno, has kindly sent us some reminiscences from which we gather that when a student of the Hindoo College, Kali Prossunno started a manuscript journal called the *Andolan Pa'tra* (Journal of Agitation) in which the conduct of students and teachers was freely criticised and received due castigation in the style of the future *Hutum*. The following doggerel which appeared in the first issue of that paper and is still remembered by Babu Pratapa Chandra will speak for itself :

Sturgeon সাহেবের Class এ পড়তো লাহা

তার নীচে ঈশ্বর সাহা ।

ঈশ্বর সাহার ছোট পেট ।

তার নীচে জয়গোপাল সেট ।

জয়গোপাল সেটের লম্বা ঠাঙ্গ ।

তার নীচে বেণী ব্যাঙ্গ ।

\* \* \* \*

তার নীচে বুনো কালো ।—

বুনো কালো মারে বড়।—

তার নীচে গুপী দড়।—

গুপী মিত্র খাতায় চিত্র,

Blank ও বুকে Black ও মার্ক।—

etc.

Owing to his excessive love of fun and frolic, he could not benefit much from the instructions he received at school, which he left at the age of sixteen in 1857.

Before we proceed to give an account of Kali Prossunno's early literary career, it would be as well to inform our readers that Kali Prossunno was married with great *eclat* on the 5th August 1854 at the age of thirteen, while still at school, to a daughter of Rai Lokenath Bose Bahadur of Baghbazar who was then a Sudder Ameen (Subordinate Judge) and was a man of great learning and suavity of manners. An account of the festivities which attended the marriage is to be found in the *Sambad Prabhakar* of the time—then edited by the famous Iswar Chunder Gupta. Unfortunately, however, Kali Prossunno's child-wife died within a few years after marriage.



Shortly afterwards, Kali Prossunno was married a second time to a daughter of Babu Chunder Nath Bose and a grand-daughter of Raja Prossunno Narain Deb. This lady is still alive.

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## CHAPTER II.

### EARLY WRITINGS.

Although Kali Prossunno did not attain much distinction at school, he acquired considerable proficiency in the English language under the able coaching of his European private tutor Mr. William Kirkpatrick. After leaving school he studied Bengali and Sanscrit literature at home with learned Pundits engaged by his guardian. He had an ardent love for Sanscrit and for his mother-tongue. At a time when Young Bengal was madly adopting English modes of life and dress, and its leaders were pluming themselves on their ignorance of the Bengali language, and contemplating with feelings of gratification the applauses earned by them by delivering discourses and lectures in the English language—prepared either by themselves or by others—at public meetings and societies, Kali Prossunno had learnt to hate the imitation of foreign manners, and following the example of plain living and high thinking set by men like the great

Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and the illustrious Akshoy Kumar Dutt, had devoted himself heart and soul to the improvement and enrichment of his neglected mother-tongue. We trace Kali Prossunno's extraordinary love for the Bengali language to the influence of his mother and grandmother on his mind when an infant. Kali Prossunno has recorded the reminiscences of his boyhood in the *Hutum Pachar Naksha* with his natural simplicity and humour in the following manner :—

“From our early boyhood we had a great regard for the Bengali language and a keen desire to learn it. We have already said that our old grandmother used to tell us various folk-tales before we went to sleep. She used to recite to us from memory many verses from Kabikankan, Krittibas and Kasiram. We also used to get them by heart and recite them at school and to our mother—who used to be highly pleased and sometimes to give us prizes in the shape of sweetmeats—one for each verse—by way of encouragement. We had a notion in our infancy that the eating of too many sweets would make us stammer in our speech, so, we used to eat only a few and scatter the rest on the terrace for crows

and pigeons ! We had a beautiful white cat named *Munjuri* (poor thing ! she died only yesterday morning—without even leaving any offspring). She also used to partake of the remnants. We had a Pundit to teach us Sanscrit. He used to take great pains to make us learn. In four years we finished *Mugdhabodh* and after reading two pages of *Magh* and three of *Raghu* we began to parade our learning. Whenever we came across a Brahmin from the *Tols* with *tiki* on head and sandal paste smeared on forehead and red broad-cloth wrapper on back, we proceeded to enter upon disputations with him, and whenever we found a young Brahmin decked out in that fashion, we managed to defeat him in disputation and cut off his *tiki* and preserve it in the way of trophy. We began to write articles for the papers—try to write verses—and to take credit for plagiarised articles. Thus, we considered ourselves equal to students of the Sanscrit College, although we never entered the portals of that institution. Our ambition soared higher than the *Hindukoosh* and the *Himalayas*—we sometimes imagined that in a few days we should rival *Kalidas*—(Beg your pardon, *Kalidas* was a libertine !) no, it won't do to be like him.

Should we emulate Dr. Johnson, the great British savant? (But he was a son of a very poor man. That wouldn't suit us.) Should we become a Rammohun Roy?—Yes, that is not a bad idea—but we couldn't die in England like him.

By and by, we began to cast about for means of becoming famous. To achieve this end, we posed ourselves as patrons of learning—we became an author—then we wished to be an editor—founded a society—became a Brahmo—we began to attend the *Tattwabodhinee Sabha*—to take part in factious disputes about widow marriage—wait on famous leaders of faction like Debendra Nath Tagore, Iswar Chandra Vidya-sagar, Akshoy Kumar Dutt and Iswar Chandra Gupta—our object being to advertise ourselves as no mean partisan of the faction led by them."

We would caution our readers, while reading this, not to take the above reminiscences too literally as a true and authentic autobiographical account. The story about the cutting off of *tikis* or top-tufts of Brahmin Pandits, for instance, though very funny and circulated in various forms by common rumour, seems to us to be nothing more than an exaggerated account of some solitary boyish prank probably played upon a Brahmin



youth nearly of the same age with *Hutum*\*. As to his connection with the *Tattwabodhinee Sabha* and the *Brahmo Samaj* under the leadership of Debendra Nath Tagore, we would refer our readers to an article recently published in the *Tattwabodhinee Patrika* (Jaistha, 1327 B.E.)

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\*The doubt expressed by us as to the truth of these stories seems to be shared also by others. We give below the purport of what Babu Amulya Charan Sen has observed in this connection in the *Arghya* of Agra-hayan of 1318 B. E.

There is a story current among us that Kali Prossunno cut off the top-tufts of many Brahmin Pundits. It is said that Kali Prossunno used to buy these top-tufts by payment of money and to hang them up in show cases with small labels stating the price and the name of the Pundit. We have however ascertained that this story is utterly false. But the rumour was once so strong that he received the nickname of "Tiki kata Zemindar". There was, however, a certain modicum of truth at the base of this rumour—which was this : Once upon a time a cow was given to a Brahmin on the occasion of a religious ceremony at Kali Prossunno's house. On his way home the Brahmin sold the cow to a butcher. On coming to know of this, Kali Prossunno sent for the Brahmin and with his own hand cut off his top-tuft. This circumstance gave rise to the rumour above referred to. It is absurd to suppose that Kali Prossunno treated all Brahmin Pundits after this fashion.

from which we gather that he used to bear a principal share of the expenses incurred at the annual distribution of presents to learned pundits, which was then a notable feature of the anniversary celebrations of the *Brahmo Samaj*, and that he presented a magnificent chandelier to the *Samaj* which is still used by it, and a new press to the *Tattwabodhinee Sabha* for the publication of its Journal. These facts confirm our belief that in depicting his own character, *Hutum* did not forget his role of caricaturist, and took good care to exaggerate its faults and conceal its nobler traits, in order to raise a good laugh against himself. If we make due allowances, however, for the distortions and overcolourings of the caricaturist and read the passage quoted above stripped of its satirical garb, we get from it some vivid glimpses of the real personality of Kali Prossunno and can form some idea of the tastes, aspirations and ambitions which governed his youthful activities.

The early writings of Kali Prossunno have now become very scarce. We have no means of gratifying our readers' curiosity as to the authors from whom he borrowed the feathers in which he strutted about as an essayist in his boyish days, but from his writings that have come down to us

we are inclined to suspect that the plagiarisms of this sworn enemy and unmasker of shams, were mostly confined to the open book of Nature—from which he gathered the precious jewels that adorned his writings—all of which bear the hall-mark of his native genius.

It appears from a prospectus published in the *Sambad Prabhakar* of the 14th December, 1855, that Kali Prossunno had written a farce entitled the *Baboo*, the first edition of which (published in 1853) had been exhausted, and that he intended to bring out a second edition of the book. We have not been able to procure a copy of this book and cannot, therefore, gratify the curiosity of our readers about its contents. But the title suggests that its object was to ridicule the vices of Young Bengal.

Kali Prossunno also appears to have written a work in two volumes entitled *Balak Ranjan* in the beginning of 1856.

We gather from a report submitted by the Rev. James Long in 1855 to the Government of Bengal on the state of Bengali literature at that time that Kali Prossunno, in 1854, founded a Bengali periodical named *Sarba Subhakari*. Its monthly subscription was annas four only. We have

heard from Pundit Sures Chandra Samajpati, the well-known editor of the *Sahitya*, that the journal used to be edited by his maternal grandfather, the venerable Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar.

It appears from the invaluable *Biographical Sketch of David Hare* by the late Peary Chand Mittra that Kali Prossunno used to take an active part in the Hare Anniversary Meetings inaugurated by the well-known public leader Kissory Chand Mittra. For many years this meeting used to be held at Kali Prossunno's house. At these meetings discourses were read by eminent men on various subjects relating to the moral and mental development of the natives of India. These discourses were usually written in English. It was Akshoy Kumar Dutt who first departed from this practice in 1845 by reading a discourse in the Bengali language "On the Changes effected by the Agency of Education in the Hindu Mind"—which elicited the highest encomiums from Kissory Chand Mittra and others. We give below an extract from the concluding portion of the speech made by Kissory Chand on that occasion :—

"The discourse we have just heard is very clever and interesting, and it is not the less so

because of its being a Bengali one. I know, Mr. Chairman, that there is a large number of our educated friends who can relish nothing that is Bengali, their taste seems to be diametrically opposed to all that is written in their own tongue. The most elevated thoughts and the most sublime sentiments when embodied in it become flat, stale and unprofitable. But this prejudice is, I am disposed to think, fast wearing out and the necessity and importance of cultivating the Bengali language, the language of our country—the language of our infancy—the language in which our earliest ideas and associations are intertwined—will ere long be recognized by all.”

The hope expressed by Kissory Chand was well-founded for we find from the reports of these anniversary meetings that many excellent discourses in Bengali were afterwards read at these meetings. Kali Prossunno, to whose love for his mother-tongue we have already alluded, read many charming papers in Bengali at the Hare Anniversary Meetings—a list of which is given below :—

A discourse in Bengali at the 14th anniversary held at the house of Baboo Kali Prossunno Singh on the 1st June, 1856.



A Bengali essay *On the Study of the Vernacular Language* at the 15th anniversary held on the 1st June, 1857.

A paper on *Bengali Drama* at the 17th anniversary held at the house of Baboo Kali Prossunno Singh on the 1st June, 1859.

A discourse in Bengali at the 19th anniversary held on the 2nd June, 1861.

A discourse in Bengali *On the State of Agriculture in Bengal and the Agricultural Exhibition* at the 21st anniversary held on the 1st June, 1863.

It is a matter of great regret that these essays are not available now.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE BIDYOTSHAHINEE SABHA AND THE RESUSCITATION OF HINDU DRAMA AND THEATRE.

In 1855, Kali Prossunno established at his house the *Bidyotshahinee Sabha*—or society for the promotion of learning—which was destined to play an important part in the work of improving the Bengali language and literature. It was the first association of its kind in this country in so far as its aim was to enrich and uphold the dignity of our vernacular literature—which had been kept completely in the background in the rage for spreading English learning in this country and disseminating European ideas and modes of thought. We have many societies of this kind now-a-days—such as the *Sahitya Parishad* and the *Sahitya Sabha*—but the first idea originated in the fertile mind of Kali Prossunno. We learn from an article in the *Sambad Prabhakar* of the 1st February, 1856—written on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Sabha—that the society did excellent work even within the small space of twelve months and inspired many educated gentlemen with a love for their mother-tongue, and that similar societies

were opened by them at their own houses. Eminent men of the time like Peary Chand Mittra Radha Nath Sikdar, Kristo Das Pal and Pundit Krishna Kamal Bhattacharyya used to attend the meetings of the *Bidyotshahini Sabha* and read discourses in the Bengali language. Kali Prossunno himself read many beautiful essays at the *Sabha*. But these also are nowhere available now.

It was to Kali Prossunno Singh and his *Bidyotshahini Sabha* that we owe the resuscitation of the Hindu drama and theatre. It is needless to expatiate on the importance of the drama as a branch of literature and the powerful educative influence of scenic representations thereof. Their chief functions, as beautifully expressed by the poet, are—

“To wake the soul by tender strokes of art  
To raise the genius, and to mend the heart ;  
To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,  
Live o’er each scene, and be what they behold.”

The state to which these noble arts had been reduced in this country owing to want of proper encouragement was pitiable indeed. There were only a few dramas worth the name to be found at this time in the whole range of Bengali literature.

We hear of obsolete dramas like *Chandi* of Bharat Chandra, *Ramani* and *Prem* of Panchanan Banerjea, *Mahanatuck* of Ramgati Kabiratna and *Bhadrarjun* of Tara Charan Sikdar, but they were never popular and have passed into deserved oblivion. The first noteworthy Bengali drama was the *Kulin-Kula-Sarbaswa* of Ramnarain Tarkaratna. It was indeed a highly creditable production and contained many fine touches of wit and humour, but it does not appear to have been meant for the stage. A few authors took the trouble to translate some English plays. Hara Chunder Ghose, a Deputy Magistrate and a distinguished scholar of his time, wrote the *Bhanumati Chittabilash* in imitation of the *Merchant of Venice* but it did not appeal to Bengali readers. Kali Prossunno realised that foreign plays were not suited to our national taste and directed his eyes to Sanscrit literature as the fountain-head at which Bengali literature took its rise, and it struck him that if Bengali plays were written after the manner of Sanscrit dramatists they would be more congenial to our national taste. So he set about writing such plays and it was through his encouragement that Ramnarain Tarkaratna, by the production of various plays

from his prolific pen, inaugurated a new epoch in the history of dramatic literature in Bengal and earned for himself an undying reputation and the nickname of 'Natuckay Narain' (Narain, the dramatist). In a report submitted by the Rev. J. Long to the Government of Bengal in 1859, the state of Bengali dramatic literature is thus described :

“A taste for Dramatic Exhibitions has lately revived among the educated Hindus, who find that translations of the Ancient Hindu Dramas are better suited to Oriental taste than translations from the English plays. \* \* \* \*

Foremost among the patrons of the Drama are Raja Pratap Chunder Singh and a young Zemindar, Kali Prossunno Singh, who has translated from the Sanskrit and distributed at his own expense, the *Malati Madhava*, *Vikrama Urvashi* and *Sabitri Satyaban*.”

The first Bengali dramatic performance of which we have any record was the enactment of the play of *Sakuntala* at the house of the late Babu Asutosh Deb (better known as Satu Babu) at Simla in February, 1857. The play was written by one Nanda Kumar Roy after Kalidas's masterpiece. The performance was, however, not very



successful. Kissory Chand Mittra in an article in the *Calcutta Review* for 1873 observed :

“The performance of ‘Sakuntala’ at Simla was, however, a failure. This is not to be wondered at : for Sakuntala, being a masterpiece of dramatic genius, requires versatile and consummate talent for its representation, rarely to be met with in this country.”

It was on the 9th April 1857 that Kali Prossunno assisted by other members of the *Eidyotshahinee Sabha* established at his palatial house, the *Bidyotshahinee Theatre* and staged the *Benisamhar* of the rising dramatist Pundit Ramnarain Tarkaratna. The performance was highly successful and elicited unanimous praise from the European and native gentlemen of rank and station who attended the theatre. We have heard from reliable sources that Kali Prossunno who represented the part of Princess Bhanumati played it to perfection, and was welcomed with roars of applause when he appeared before the admiring gaze of the audience as a beautiful girl dressed in a rich gold-embroidered Benares *Sari* and decked with priceless jewels which belonged to his family and which excited the envy of the richest men in Calcutta. The diction of the play

being rather heavy, and there being other defects in it, it was not quite suited to the stage. There being no other good dramas suitable for the purpose, Kali Prossunno thought of supplying the desideratum by writing a play himself.

Within a short time after this (in September, 1857) Kali Prossunno published the *Vikramorbasi*. It was a free translation into idiomatic Bengali of the famous drama of the immortal Kalidas. The work was dedicated to Maharajadhiraj Mahtab Chand Bahadoor of Burdwan in the following terms :—

To

HIS HIGHNESS

THE MAHARAJAH OF BURDWAN,

This work is most respectfully dedicated  
as an humble but sincere token  
of the

Translator's Esteem for the noble love  
And most gracious patronage  
with which

His Highness has distinguished  
The cause of the Vernacular Literature  
of the Country.

CALCUTTA :

20th Sept. 1857.

The book was written so admirably that few could believe that it was the production of a boy of sixteen. A correspondent in the *Englishman* suggested that its author was one Pundit Deno Nath Sharma. In prompt contradiction of this statement, the *Hindoo Patriot* observed in its issue of the 12th November, 1857 :

“A letter appeared in yesterday’s *Englishman* purporting to be from Deno Nath Shurma stating that the *Vikramorbasi* of Kalidas was translated not by Baboo Kali Prossunno Singh but by the Pundit himself, who has been deprived of his just credit by the Baboo’s appropriation of the translatorship. To-day the Pundit comes forward in *propria persona* to deny that the letter was written by him or by his authority.”

The book has now become very scarce but it was very highly appreciated at the time of its publication. We give below the purport of a review of the work which appeared in the *Bibidhartho Sangraha*—then edited by Dr. (afterwards Raja) Rajendralala Mitra :—

“Encouraged by the praises with which the performance of *Benisamhara Na’uck* was greeted,

Pabu Kali Prossunno Singh set about writing a drama himself and the result is a translation into Bengali of the *Vikramorbasi Natuck*. The age of the talented author cannot be more than seventeen years. At such an age boys generally read in schools ; few of them venture or are able to write books. But the above-named Babu has already won the praises of his countrymen by writing at this young age various books and editing journals and periodicals. We hope that by following honestly the path of truth and virtue, his literary powers will gain in strength from day to day and his love of learning will be an example to the young men of other rich families of Bengal and stimulate their nobler propensities. A portion of the work under notice was published before in the *Purnachandrodaya* ; the whole of it has now been published for being played on the stage of the *Bidyotshahinee Sabha*. No reference has been made in the preface to the first publication of a portion of the book—probably it had been published by the author himself in order to see how the public would receive it. It would seem from the elegance of the style that he did not, like other modern authors, take the help of the Pundits, for it is

singularly free from the smell of snuff\*. The Drama of *Vikramorbasi* was written by the great poet Kálidás. It describes the love-story of *Pururoba*, a King of the Lunar Dynasty and *Urbasi*, a nymph."

In November, 1857, Kali Prossunno's *Vikramorbasi* was staged at the *Bidyotshahinee Theatre* with great *eclat*. Kali Prossunno himself appeared in the role of *Pururoba*. The late Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee (then a boy of thirteen) and other distinguished men represented the other parts. Before the establishment of the Belgatchia Theatre by Rajas Pertaup Chander Singh and Iswar Chander Singh of Paikpara, Bengal had never witnessed such pomp and splendour exhibited in a dramatic entertainment. The *elite* of Calcutta society—both European and Native, graced the occasion with their presence. The spacious courtyard of Kali Prossunno's house, which was one of the biggest in Calcutta, was so overcrowded that many people had to go away disappointed for want of accommodation. The following account of

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\*The learned Pundits of Bengal are notorious snuff-takers.



the performance appeared in the *Hindoo Patriot* of the 3rd December, 1857 :—

THE BIDYOTSHAHINEE THEATRE.

“Our readers will probably remember that about six weeks ago we reviewed in these columns Babu Kali Prossunno Singh’s translation of the *Vikramorbasi* of Kalidas. In the present issue we have to notice the performance of that drama, got up under the auspices of the same Baboo, in his own mansion. The native gentry of Calcutta and the Suburbs, representing the intelligence, taste, good sense, fashion and respectability of Hindu society, were all present in gorgeous winter garments, but the audience was too large for the place, and we hear with regret that many members of the Chowringhee aristocracy were obliged to run counter on account of the alarming density of the collection. Whatever the public may complain of with respect to the unrestricted distribution of tickets of admission, we must do justice to Baboo Kali Prossunno Singh to whose liberal mind and generous munificence Calcutta owes a most magnificent institution for rational amusement. The *Bidyotshahinee Theatre* is in the second year of its existence, and though it is

a private property, the intelligent and respectable public may as freely enjoy its benefit as they do partake of the common air we live in. The *eclat* with which the *Vikramorbasi* was performed on the last occasion was great. The stage was most beautifully decorated and the theatre-room was as nobly adorned as cultivated taste could dictate or enlightened fashion could lead to. No delicate consideration of economy was ever thought of, and the result was most magnificent and gratifying. The marble painting on the frontispiece of the stage was as neat as elegant, and the stone pictures of *Bharata* and *Kalidas*, though mostly imaginary, were executed with so much nicety and taste that one was involuntarily reminded of the classic days of Grecian sculpture and painting, casting into form gods and goddesses of heavenly birth. The reception was very courteous and gracious, which was conducted by our excellent townsman Baboo Hara Chunder Ghose. But we cannot afford space for details, though the narration of which in the present instance is pleasant. We shall at once notice the performance, leaving aside all unnecessary preliminaries and the grateful reminiscences of elder drama.

The peculiar characteristic of our theatricals is the absence of dramatic opening, which belongs to the romantic school of the modern drama. We have the old Grecian way of opening the play by the appearance of the manager of the stage, who explains to the audience the nature and character, and, in some instances, the incidents of the performances. But the accompaniment of music and song relieves that dull delay and patience-trespassing colon, which like a forced march is always tiresome, for we must bear in mind that the spectator has ever the incidents of the story vividly stamped on his mental vision, and does not wait to be helped in the margin. In the *Bidyotshahinee Theatre* the music was excellent, both when the amateurs performed and when the Town Band played. They awakened in the souls of the feeling portion of the audience who had any sympathy for sounds the most pleasant emotions and kept the chord in a remarkably beautiful harmony. Of the performance nothing can be exaggeratedly stated. The part of the King *Pururoba*, represented by Pabu Kali Prossunno Singh, was admirably done. His mien was right royal, and his voice truly imperial. From the first scene of the play when

he with his pleasant companion, a civilized buffoon, commenced to interchange words of fellowship, to the last scene when he was translated with his fair *Oorbasi* to heaven, he kept the attention of the audience continuously alive and made a most gladsome impression on their minds. Every word he gave utterance to was suited to the action which followed it. In the language of the poet he did truly hold the mirror up to nature. Whose heart did not palpitate with the most quick emotions when the king, hearing the nymphs cry for help, announced his approach in the most heroic strain, and went to their relief? The act was as chivalrous as it was heroic. There was the romance of real life represented in true colors. But how sweetly does the language of love convey its meaning to a lover's mind. *Oorbasi* is rescued from the infernal clutches of the demon, she thanks in a soft but most eloquent language her gallant saviour; *Chittrolekha*, her lady of honor, mingles in the song of thanksgiving, while the king hears in the dulcet air the most passionate voice of love. The scene lay in the Hemcoot Range, and the romantic objects that allured observation from around, with the angelic charms of *Oorbasi* and

the glorious graces of her lovely companion, threw the mind of the king into a kind of magical enchantment, and his vision thenceforth became the heavenly fair. Then comes the scene of the descending of the heavenly car with *Oorbasi* and *Chittralekha* on, singing in a most rapturous strain and lapping the gazing soul literally as it were in Elysian bliss. If there could be angel visits on earth which poets sing of, the appearance of *Oorbasi* with her ethereal companion in the heavenly car was such a visit. It struck the heart of every one of the spectators. It almost realized the scriptural vision of Elijah's ascension to Heaven. We have seen pictures of Grecian gods driving chariots and read of ancient heroes skimming the air through such cars, but all the glowing figures of imagination which we had formed melted away as the mists disappeared and the heavenly car from Indra's region neared our common earth. The attitude of *Oorbasi* on the car was delightfully picturesque, and the sweet songs and music which attended the descent gave it the glow of an Arabian Night's dream. But the enchantment was not yet complete. She came and vanished like a vision. The king was restless, and in the madness of love appealed



with child-like simplicity to the counsel of *Bidoosok*, the buffoon, who like Lear's fool mocked his sorrow, but never leaving his moralizing occupation. The disconsolate *Debee*, wife to the king, worships the gods to cure her husband's misdirected love, but subsequently moved by the frantic state of the Rajah disavows her worship, recalls her prayer and seconds his wish to propitiate the deities to gratify his desire. This is the true picture of the Hindu lady who at the sacrifice of her own happiness would even submit to austerities and observances for the fulfilment of her lord's wishes. Next opens the most affecting part of the play. The commencement is solemn and the circumstance serious. The electric light opens upon the air and the artillery of heaven roars tremendously—in the midst of this scene the king enters singly and in a state of a great excitement, cries for *Oorbasi* in a most lamentable strain, turns his mind inward, discourses with his own soul, rings the bells of his passion, and addresses the woods and trees, the birds and skies, in a most pathetic tone. This part of the action was most difficult, and our friend Kali Prossunno sustained it most nobly. If love could be feigned, Kali Prossunno did it

well. Thereon addressing the mountain—now the woods behind,—now the river beneath and now the birds above, with the essential pauses of affection, when the heart is rent by the agony of love, like Milton's Adam at the loss of Eve—the soliloquizing in the most pathetic manner and calling forth the most tender emotion from the deep wells of passion *a la Hamlet*—the repeated falls which the king met with from the negative replies which he construed in that frantic mood from the significant sounds that dropped—all these were quite natural and most admirably put into action. However we would not give anything for the *Oorbosi* for whom the king had spent so much breath. We doubt whether our countrymen would content themselves with presenting to the world such an *Oorbasi* whom poetry represents as the paragon of beauty as was represented at the *Bidyotshahinee Theatre*. But we do not disparage her. She will make a different being—that is more acceptable,—if she continue on earth, for love-making in heaven is quite another affair, and is not suited to the taste of us mortals. *Bidoosok* was ably performed, but his jokes were lost partly on account of the noise, and partly on account of the

unintelligibility of the language. The Cowar was just like Home's Young Norval, and the caressing address of *Oorbasi*, set in tune, was most magnificently done. Other characters were indifferently good, but the voice which spoke from behind the scene was really abominable.

While we thus do justice to Baboo Kali Prossunno Singh, we must however be allowed to express one patriotic wish. With all its excellencies the *Bidyotshahinee Theatre* is a private establishment, though its very existence is a sign of the times. This attempt to cultivate the drama is justly praise-worthy, but what we would like to have is a public institution of the kind of a permanent character. The age is much too advanced to wait for an elaborate dissertation on the usefulness of such an institution in order to get it established. There are many among us, we know, with good sense and sufficiency enough to come forward and aid such a project, and at the head of that band we unhesitatingly put down the name of Baboo Kali Prossunno Singh. Let the lovers and patrons of the drama form themselves into a body, take the project into their consideration and they are

assured of every encouragement and co-operation from the *Hindoo Patriot*."

The appeal made in the concluding portion of the above notice bore almost immediate fruit, for, shortly afterwards, the enlightened Rajahs of Paikparah (Rajah Pertaup Chunder Singh and Rajah Iswar Chunder Singh) and Baboo (afterwards Maharajah Sir) Jatindra Mohun Tagore and others founded the famous Belgatchia Theatre. It was the success of the *Bidyotshahinee Theatre* that induced these noblemen to embark on this project. The name of Kali Prossunno, therefore, deserves to be written large in the history of the Theatre in Bengal as a pioneer and prime-mover. Sir Cecil Beadon and others spoke in high terms of the successful manner in which the play of *Vikramorbasi* was acted on the boards of the *Bidyotshahinee Theatre*. Kissory Chand Mittra, in an article on *Modern Hindoo Drama* published in the *Calcutta Review* of 1873 writes,—

"There was a large gathering of native and European gentlemen, who were unanimous in praising the performance. Among the latter, Mr., afterwards Sir, Cecil Beadon, the then Secretary to the Government of India, expressed to us his unfeigned pleasure at the admirable way

in which the principal characters sustained their parts."

In 1858, Kali Prossunno wrote and published another play entitled the *Sabitri Satyaban*. We glean from the old files of the *Sambad Prabhakar* that the play was rehearsed at the *Bidyotshahinee Theatre* on the 23rd Jaistha, 1265 Bengali Era (June, 1858). In his *Vikramorbasi* he had closely followed Kalidas, but this work was to all intents and purposes an original one, for he took only the main plot of the drama from the *Mahabharata*, but the scenes were drawn from his own fancy. The book is embellished with numerous songs set to music. We give below free translations of some of these :—

### I.

I cannot move, a numb-like sense  
 Doth seem my heavy feet to bind ;  
 How can I take my body hence,  
 And leave my love-sick soul behind ?

My eyes refuse to turn from him,  
 Ah me, how can I steer my course ?  
 My frame doth quake in every limb,  
 And holds me back as if by force.



## II.

Fortune, in a generous fit,  
    Brought me this jewel of my soul ;  
Now wantonly I'm robbed of it,  
    Before my cup of joy is full.

The fire of separation hath  
    Been burning me so long, and I  
Just reached love's sea-shore for a bath,  
    And plunged in but to find it dry.

## III.

Take heed, O Man, of little sense,  
    And pray to that Eternal Being,  
The very thought of whom shall fence  
    And guard thee safe from Hades' King.

Rapt in dreams of mine and thine,  
    And of worldly wealth and toys,  
Forgettest thou the path divine,  
    Which leads to heaven and holy joys.

Unstable are the things of earth,  
    And transient is thy life below,  
Prepare to leave thy home and hearth,  
    And take thy wage of weal or woe.

## IV.

Having taken human birth  
In this selfish, sinful earth,  
Forget not, man, the name of God,  
There's none to save thee but the Lord.

'This is mine' and 'that is mine',—  
Thou art saying all the time,—  
But soon shall pass away this dream,  
For things are not what they do seem.

Deepest love and wildest passions,  
After all, are mere illusions,  
Which like shadows pass from sight,  
As darkness comes at fall of night.

Nothing here can conquer death,  
Save glorious deeds and honor's breath ;  
All things else shall surely die,  
One by one, as moments fly.

This human frame is like a cage,  
With nine doors\* open day and night ;  
No one knows the time or age,  
When the soul will take its flight.

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\*According to the Hindus, there are nine passages of exit in the human body through which the soul can pass out.

Once the soul-bird flies away,  
And leaves its golden cage below,  
Whatever lure you offer may,  
Will it e'er return?—Ah, no !

In 1859, Kali Prossunno wrote and published yet another drama the *Malati Madhab* based on Bhababhuti's well-known Sanscrit work of the same name. "The translation is most respectfully dedicated to all lovers of the Hindoo Theatre by the translator." The book was not, however, a mere translation but was almost an original work and abounded with many beautiful songs. The style and diction of this book differed from those of his previous works. The reason given by the author in his Preface was that the language of his previous works was not quite suited to the purposes of the stage, and so he was obliged to adapt it to these purposes. We give below a translation of one of the songs :—

Life is gall when Hope doth wither,  
Adverse Fate turns sweet to bitter ;  
How I longed to meet my Love !  
Counter willed the Powers above !  
Planted I the tree of Hope,  
In the garden of my love ;

And I watered it with care,  
Watching, O ! with bated breath,  
For the fruits that it should bear :—  
Little dreaming that despair  
So should come in sudden storm,  
Tear it up and cause its death !

That Kali Prossunno continued to take a lively and active interest in the development of the Bengali Theatre till his death is evidenced by the fact that even in 1867, we find him filling the Office of President of the Managing Committee of the Shovabazar Private Theatrical Society which was composed of many respectable and distinguished gentlemen of the time. It was announced in a leaflet published by the above society that he would act the part of Bhim Singh in the first public performance (on 12th February, 1867), of the play of *Krishnakumari* at the Shovabazar Rajbati. But it appears that owing to domestic troubles he was unable to keep the engagement.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE HINDOO PATRIOT.

The improvement of the Bengali literature and the resuscitation of Hindoo Drama and Theatre were not the only objects to which Kali Prussunno devoted his energies. After careful consideration of the work and events of Kali Prossunno's life, we have come to the conclusion that the keynote of his character was patriotism. His fame and greatness rests mainly upon his laudable efforts to ameliorate the condition of his country in all its aspects. In his efforts to uphold national ideals and traditions, to promote national literature, to improve the national theatre, to disseminate the teachings of the Hindu Shastras, and his labors in support of other movements calculated to do good to the country, we see only different phases of his deep and abiding love for his country and his nation. He was not only a patron of Bengali literature but also a generous supporter of journals conducted by educated natives in English and other languages for educating and improving the national mind. When, in 1861, Dr. Shambhu



Chunder Mookerjee started the *Mookerjee's Magazine*, Kali Prossunno purchased a press at a considerable expense and lent the free use of it to the editor. The Press was afterwards placed at the disposal of the manager of the *Bengalee*, founded by Grish Chunder Ghose in May 1862 with the avowed object of "defending Truth and Justice and faithfully and fearlessly representing the Ryot to the Ruler and the Ruler to the Ryot"—an object with which Kali Prussunno was in deep sympathy. A similar impulse led him to purchase, at the instance of the late Nawab Abdul Luteef Khan Bahadoor, the proprietary rights in *Doorbin*—an Urdu newspaper, and conduct it for sometime. The same generous propensity induced him to purchase the proprietary rights in the *Hindoo Patriot* upon the death of its illustrious editor Hurrish Chunder Mukerjee. We now proceed to state briefly his connection with the *Hindoo Patriot*.

On the 14th June, 1861, Hurrish Chunder Mukerjee, the illustrious editor of the *Hindoo Patriot*, passed away. Hurrish Chunder was not a man of words but a man of action. He not only vigorously championed the cause of the down-trodden indigo ryots in his celebrated journal by

means of his powerful pen but frequently helped them pecuniarily from his own pocket. He applied his hard-earned money for the good of his fellow-countrymen. Although Hurrish Chunder attained the highest position open to an uncovenanted servant of Government, he left nothing at his death except his dwelling house at Bhowanipore and the *Hindoo Patriot* Press. Under these circumstances the discontinuance of the *Hindoo Patriot* was inevitable. At this juncture, Kali Prossunno being impressed with the importance and necessity of preventing the extinction of this independent organ of native public opinion, came forward and purchased the proprietary interests in the Press and the goodwill of the paper for a sum of Rs. 5,000. There was another strong motive which induced Kali Prossunno to enter into this bargain. He not only loved his country but also adored his distinguished countrymen. One of his objects in purchasing the *Hindoo Patriot* was to afford relief to the helpless family of Hurrish Chunder in a way that would least hurt their sensibilities.

It may not be out of place to mention here the strenuous exertions of Kali Prussunno to perpetuate the memory of Hurrish Chunder. He not

only made a donation of Five Hundred Rupees to the Hurrish Memorial Fund but also published a pamphlet eulogising the merits of the deceased 'Hindoo Patriot' and calling upon his countrymen to raise a fitting memorial in his honor. This pamphlet contains a vivid sketch of the character and career of that eminent man and is written in chaste and elegant Bengali. In it he assigned to Hurrish Chunder a higher position than even Rammohun Roy and Iswar Chunder Vidyasagar in the roll of the nation's benefactors. Kissory Chand Mitra thus referred to the pamphlet in the *Indian Field*, then edited by him:—

“We have received a funeral eulogè by Baboo Kali Prossunno Singh on the late editor of the *Hindoo Patriot* which has been published at the Pooran Sangraha Press. The language used is chaste and classical but perhaps too refined and elevated for common readers. The writer depicts the character and delineates the career of the late Harish Chunder Mookerjee. He calls on his fellow-countrymen to open their purse-strings to commemorate the distinguished services of the deceased and we trust the call will be cordially responded to.”

It is a deplorable fact that although in this country memorial meetings in honor of deceased worthies are common enough, yet they seldom produce results at all proportionate to the exhibition of sentiment and oratorical outbursts they call forth. Subscriptions poured in from all parts of India to the Hurrish Memorial Fund, but the work of the managing committee showed no progress. The form which the memorial was to take had not even been decided upon. Noticing this tardiness of action, Kali Prossunno who was a member of the Memorial Committee, in a letter dated the 9th November, 1861, addressed to the Secretary to the Hurrish Memorial Committee, signified his readiness to grant a piece of land should the Committee decide upon building a Memorial Hall. We reproduce below the letter *in extenso* :—

To

BABOO KRISTO DOSS PAUL,

SECRETARY, HURRISH MEMORIAL COMMITTEE.

SIR,

As the form of the memorial to the memory of the late Baboo Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee has

not been definitely settled, I believe it would be in consonance with the views and wishes of many of the subscribers, if the funds were applied to the erection of a building for public use, to be called after his name, instead of being employed in the establishment of one or two scholarships as originally contemplated. I for one decidedly am for such a memorial building, and if my colleagues in the committee approve of the proposition, I will feel it a pride to dedicate to this purpose a portion of my land, say 2 beegahs or thereabout, situated in Sukeas Street, commonly called Badoor Bagan. The site which I have selected with the approval of some of my friends and colleagues in the committee, faces the Upper Circular Road in the East and Sukeas Street in the North, and as it is comparatively free from the bustle of the town, while at the same time quite contiguous to the most populous part of the Native Quarter, I trust it will answer our object very well. The sum which has been already subscribed and partly realized amounts I believe to ten thousand rupees, and I have no doubt that when this plan of Memorial Building is announced there will be no lack of funds to carry it out. There are many friends and



admirers of the late "Hindoo Patriot" who have not yet subscribed, and I can state with confidence that it is the feeling of some of the leading subscribers to the fund, that if there be a small deficiency at the end, they will be glad to be reassessed for the purpose of making up that deficiency.

If the Memorial Building such as I suggest can be erected you can open there Reading and Assembly Rooms, establish a conversazione, have lectures, music, dramatic performances and diverse other enlightened recreations and amusements, such as make life agreeable and society enjoyable. A public building of this description has long been a desideratum, and we would but ill serve the public interests did we miss this opportunity of supplying it. I need hardly add that nothing could be a more fitting testimonial to the memory of the lamented deceased than this, who, be it remembered, was a staunch and earnest friend to the promotion of worthy intellectual and social intercourse among our countrymen.

Should my colleagues in the committee approve of the proposition I shall be glad to execute a deed of conveyance for the above-

mentioned land in favor of such Trustees as they may appoint.

I have &c.

(Sd.) KALIPROSSUNNO SINGH.

P.S.—I enclose herewith a rough sketch of the ground.

Kali Prossunno's offer was accepted with thanks. It is, however, a pity that through the machinations of some prominent members of the British Indian Association, which owed its position as a power in the State to the genius of Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee, the scheme was ultimately abandoned and the money collected by the Memorial Committee amounting to about Rs. 10,500 was wholly applied to the erection of the British Indian Association building. A dark and dingy room on the ground floor of this building containing some worm-eaten Government Gazettes and dusty reports and newspapers and bearing a marble tablet inscribed with the words 'Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee Library,' is all that now remains to remind the nation of the noble work rendered to the country by that illustrious patriot. In this connection Babu Ramgopal Sanyal in his interesting "*Remini-*

*scences and Anecdotes of Great men of India*” observes :—

“After a lapse of full 16 years, a dark room in the lower floor of the building of the British Indian Association was solemnly inaugurated and declared as ‘Hurrish Chunder Library.’ The truth of the matter is that some of the influential members of the Association who had contributed handsomely to the fund, contrived in collusion with Babu Kristo Das Pal, to appropriate the entire fund to the erection of the building of the Association, and a nominal memorial was raised, to the great shame of the entire Bengalee nation.”

So, the Memorial Hall contemplated by Kali Prossunno which was to contain a statue of Lord Canning, the greatest Governor-General that came out to India, in front of it, and a portrait of Sir John Peter Grant, the liberator of the Indigo ryot, within the Hall—was never erected ; but, when we think of the noble impulse which prompted Kali Prossunno to come forward with the offer of money and land to do honor to the memory of a national hero and thus add to the glory of his country—our heart becomes elated with joy and our head bends down in reverence to the spirit of patriotism that inspired this true

friend of his country. Kali Prossunno's offer was referred to in the following terms by Raja Rajendralala Mitra in his speech at the inaugural meeting of the Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee Library in 1876 :—

“The feeling was strong in favour of a memorial building and the late Babu Kali Prossunno Singh, *who was so honorably noted for the deep interest he took in every thing that was noble and generous and conducive to the well-being of his countrymen*, came forward with an offer to place at the disposal of the committee, a plot of land, measuring 2 Biggahs, situated on the Upper Circular Road, on condition that the committee should build at their cost a suitable house for a Library and for public meeting, conversaziones and theatrical performances. The offer was accepted, plans were prepared, and a trust appointed, but the subscriptions raised proved utterly inadequate for the purpose.”

Kali Prossunno, after his purchase of the *Hindoo Patriot* entrusted the management of the paper to Dr. Shambhu Chunder Mookerjee. It will appear from the following extract from the *Hindoo Patriot* of the 26th June, 1861 that almost immediately after the death of Hurrish Chunder

Mookerjee, Grish Chunder Ghose, the founder and first editor of the *Hindoo Patriot* had, in the interests of the family of his deceased friend and colleague, assumed the editorship of the paper for the second time :—

“The *Patriot* will henceforth be conducted in Calcutta. *The paper has reverted to those hands that first started it.* But the hand of hands is, alas, wanting ! The reader will in vain seek for those brilliant political crushers which awed and astonished the local Press and sent dismay into the factories. Providence in his own inscrutable wisdom has taken back to himself that spirit which flashed like a meteor over the country and disappeared as suddenly as it had burst upon the eye. The tear of friendship is not yet dry, and we are called upon to resume the pen which had been all but laid aside for the last three years in admiration of the talent which raised the *Hindoo Patriot* to the position of a power in the realm. The public will perhaps excuse our short-comings when we tell them that their forbearance is craved *in the interest of the bereaved mother and the unfortunate widow of the remarkable man who devoted his fortune and his life to the service of his country.*”



Shambhu Chunder had a very high regard for Grish Chunder and looked upon him as his literary guide.. He styled himself the 'managing editor' of the paper but Grish Chunder continued to be the Chief Editor. About this time, the question of Indigo disturbances and the memorable trial of the Rev. James Long came into the forefront of public discussion, and the fearless and independent writings of Grish Chunder maintained the prestige of the *Hindoo Patriot* at its highest level. But this arrangement did not last long. Kristo Das Pal, who had been appointed Assistant Secretary to the British Indian Association on the recommendation of Hurrish Chunder—under whom he served also as Assistant Editor of the *Hindoo Patriot* with Shambhu Chunder Mookerjee—had a high ambition and became anxious to secure the Editorship of the *Hindoo Patriot*. Kali Prossunno who had always the best interest of his country at heart was loth to allow this liberal paper to degenerate into a mere organ of the Zemindars of the British Indian Association. But Kali Prossunno's guardian Hara Chunder Ghose, who was very fond of Kristo Das, tried his best to secure the Editorship of the journal for his protégé. Shambhu

Chunder used to reside at the Baradwaree palace of Kali Prossunno, who loved his company very much. A rumour was set afloat that the 'extravagance' of Kali Prossunno in munificent donations for works of public utility was due to Shambhu Chunder's suggestions and advice. Coming to know of this, Shambhu Chunder severed his connection with Kali Prossunno and left his house—although the friendly feelings between them were never estranged. In November, 1861, Grish Chunder also for some reason or other, resigned the Editorship of the *Hindoo Patriot*. In this difficulty Kali Prossunno sought the advice of Pundit Iswar Chunder Vidyasagar. Vidyasagar got the paper edited successively by Kunja Lall Banerjee (afterwards a Judge of the Calcutta Small Cause Court), Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Dwarkanath Mitra (afterwards a Judge of the Calcutta High Court) for short periods of time, but he found that the prestige of the paper was suffering by reason of its being edited by inexperienced hands. He at last entrusted the editorial control of the paper to Nobin Kristo Bose, Koylash Chunder Bose and Kristo Das Pal. Under the joint Editorship of these three gentlemen, the paper

continued for sometime. At last it came into the hands of Kristo Das Pal as sole Editor. Kristo Das did not like the idea of working under the direction of Iswar Chunder Vidya-sagar. He induced several prominent members of the British Indian Association to approach Kali Prossunno with a request to make over the management of the paper to them. Kali Prossunno at first refused to comply with this request but afterwards agreed to make over the management and control of the *Hindoo Patriot* to a body of Trustees consisting of himself and Rajah Pertaup Chunder Singh, Babu (afterwards Maharajah Sir) Ramanath Tagore, Babu (afterwards Maharajah Sir) Jatindramohun Tagore and Babu (afterwards Rajah) Rajendralala Mitra. We reproduce below the Trust Deed of the *Hindoo Patriot* which bears evidence of Kali Prossunno's deep love for his country and profound regard for Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee.

(Translation of the Bengali) Trust Deed  
of the *Hindoo Patriot*.\*

To

Srijuta Raja Pratap Chunder Singh, Srijuta  
Babu Ramanath Tagore, Srijuta Babu  
Jotindra Mohun Tagore and Srijuta  
Babu Rajendra Lal Mitra.

Written by Srijuta Kali Prossunno Singh, of  
Calcutta, Jorashanka, is this Trust-Deed.

Being always variously engaged, and being  
unable to fully supervise and conduct the work  
with regard to the *Hindoo Patriot*,—an English  
newspaper so named,—the said newspaper and  
the type, fittings and furniture of the same,  
together with the power of realizing outstanding  
bills, etc., do I hereby make over to you and do  
hereby appoint you trustees of the same.

You, holding the newspaper and the type and  
the debts, etc., as trustees, shall, in the following  
manner, following the undermentioned rules,  
conduct all business connected with and arising  
in the management of the paper, duly and  
satisfactorily as in your hands the paper will

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\*Appendix to Babu Ramgopal Sanyal's *Life of the  
Hon'ble Rai Kristo Das Pal Bahadur, C.I.E.*

likely be of service to the country. I do hereby admit that henceforward I shall have no right of property or share in the returns of the same paper, type, furniture, etc.

That at no subsequent time shall I, or my heirs, or assigns claim the same or hold the same to be subject to any claims. If I, or any of my heirs, assigns do set up such a claim it shall be null and void.

### RULES.

1. That, during the time of the late Editor, the late Babu Hurish Chunder Mukerjee,—this paper, the *Hindoo Patriot*, having been so named and established, the name *Hindoo Patriot* shall never be changed. That so long as the paper shall remain in your trust, the said paper shall be published under the name of the *Hindoo Patriot*, and that you shall not incorporate or amalgamate the same with any other newspaper or newspapers.

2. That you shall, at no time, injure or prejudice the working of the same, during the period of your management. That moreover excepting the said newspaper and the good-will for the same you are hereby empowered to sell



the type, fittings and furniture of the same. But that you shall, without enjoying the money so realized by sale, pay out of the same the debts of the paper and make over the balance, if any, to the Hurish Memorial Fund.

3. If you amalgamate the *Hindoo Patriot* with any other newspaper, or if you incorporate with the same *Hindoo Patriot* any Printing Press, etc., such press, types, fittings and furniture, etc., you shall be at liberty to sell at your will, and employ the returns of the same in whatever manner you may please.

4. That I shall have no power to call for the accounts or make you accountable for the receipts and disbursements on account of the same paper.

5. That you shall have no right to sell the newspaper namely the *Hindoo Patriot*, or the good-will of the same. But you are hereby empowered to make over the said newspaper and the good-will of the same to any person or persons who may, in your judgment, seem fit and proper for the purpose of doing good to the country, and if they so apply.

6. At the decease of any of you or if any of you withdraw from the trust, the surviving

trustees may at their will resign or appoint in his place another trustee of like abilities and influence.

7. That the number of trustees shall not exceed five nor be less than three. Nor shall it be necessary to consult me with reference to the appointment of trustees. I shall have no power to appoint other trustees in your place, or hinder you.

8. That you shall conjointly and in agreement conduct the business. If there be any variance of opinion the paper shall be conducted according to the opinion of the majority.

9. If any trustee be declared insolvent, or if he be in any way incapacitated or commit felony (or do a misdeed) you shall remove him and have the power to appoint a new trustee in his place.

10. To do the trust duties I remain with you as a trustee and shall have like powers as yours and follow the above-mentioned rules. If I conduct myself otherwise than as herein laid down, you shall have the power to carry out the requirements of para. 9 of this Deed.

11. The above-mentioned rules shall be followed in the working of the *Hindoo Patriot*, and further if as laid down in para. 2 it be necessary to sell, it shall be sold.

For these reasons I renounce all proprietary right and claim to the *Hindoo Patriot*, the type, fittings, and furniture, &c.; and write this Trust-Deed—this the 4th of Sraban of 1269, Bengali year.

(Sd.) SREE KALI PROSSUNNO SINGHA.

CALCUTTA :

19th July, 1862.

Witness :

SREE NOBIN CHUNDER MUKERJI.

„ KRISTO DAS PAL.

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## CHAPTER V.

### PATRIOTISM AND PUBLIC SPIRIT.

As we have already said, the year 1861 is memorable for the *Nil Durpan* trial, which created no small amount of sensation in the native as well as the European community. Several well-written histories of this famous trial have recently been published in English, among which may be mentioned *The Indigo Disturbance* compiled by Babu Lalit Chandra Mitra, M.A., a son of Denobundhoo Mitra, the famous author of the *Nil Durpan*, and we therefore think it unnecessary to give a detailed account of it. Suffice it to say that the publication by the Rev. James Long of an English translation of that thrilling Bengali drama—the *Nil Durpan*—in which the horrible cruelties practised by the planters on the poor Indigo ryots were depicted in vivid colors that remind one of Mrs. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, so incensed the planters and their mouthpieces the *Englishman* and the *Hurkaru* that they brought a charge of defamation against him in the Supreme Court. After a protracted trial, the Judge, Mr. Justice (afterwards Sir Mordaunt)

Wells passed on him a sentence of one month's imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 1,000. Kali Prossunno took a great interest in the case, which was really one between the Indigo Planters on the one side, and the missionaries, the Government and the people on the other. As observed by Grish Chunder Ghose, in a leading article headed *the Trial of the Reverend Mr. Long*, which appeared in the *Hindoo Patriot* of the 25th July 1861, "the fact was that Mr. Long was neither the only nor the principal defendant in the case. Looking at the broadest aspects of the question, he was simply a John Doe, a convenient fiction, by means of whom or which a more distant party might be touched. Barrister Mr. Peterson was perfectly right when he declared that the Government had been put upon their trial. Nay, more than that, the defendants were more numerous than the Court could accommodate, and a far more important body than even the Government. They were the nation, which has always sympathized with the ryot's wrongs, which has assisted him in his deliverance, and which relying on the law of libel which Mr. Justice Wells has just repealed with retrospective effect, spoke its lonest sentiments on Indigo planting freely."



Kali Prossunno personally attended the Supreme Court, then located in the Maidan, to witness the trial. As soon as the sentence was passed Kali Prossunno came forward and paid down the whole amount of the fine. It is said that Mr. Justice Wells was so much taken by surprise that he asked who he was. "I am Kali Prossunno Singh", was the reply. "Why do you pay the fine for Mr. Long?" asked the Judge again. "Because I *feel* for him," was the proud rejoinder.

For a millionaire like Kali Prossunno Singh, the payment of a sum of Rs. 1,000 might be considered a trifle, but when we think of the largeness of the heart that throbbed in sympathy with the distress of a foreigner, that urged him on in defiance of the frowns of the men in power to come forward and express the nation's gratitude to one of its real benefactors—and by doing so to uphold the honor of the nation, we lose ourselves in admiration, and our hearts are elevated to a higher level.

It may not be out of place to mention here that at the time of departure of the Revd. Mr. Long from India in 1862, Kali Prossunno Singh presented him with a handsome address from the *Bidyotsahini Sabha* as we learn from the *Hindoo*.

*Patriot* of the 3rd March, 1862\*. It is a matter of great regret that no copy of this address is available at present.

We have heard from Babu Lalit Chandra Mitra, that when the Rev. Mr. Long's trial was going on, there were reasons to apprehend that Babu Denobundhoo Mitra would be the next victim of the wrath of the Indigo Planters, and that Kali Prossunno gave him an earnest assurance that if money could save him, he was perfectly safe, for he (Kali Prossunno) was ready to come to his rescue with all the means in his possession.

We glean from old files of the *Shome Prakash*, edited by Pundit Dwarkanath Vidyabhusan, that the first edition of the *Nil Durpan* having been exhausted, Kali Prossunno reprinted it at his own expense and distributed it broadcast.

We give here another instance of Kali Prossunno's desire and readiness to establish and uphold the honor of his country.

In the course of the *Nil Durpan* trial, Sir

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\*"The Biddotshahinee Sabha headed by Babu Kali Prossunno Sing presented an excellent valedictory Address to the Rev. James Long on the day of his departure. The address does honour to those from whom it emanated."—*Hindoo Patriot*, 3rd March, 1862.

Mordaunt Wells took frequent occasion to traduce the Bengali Nation as a nation of liars. It is indeed probable that many of the witnesses who come to give evidence in criminal cases are untruthful, but it certainly does not become a Judge to indulge in such sweeping remarks on the character of a whole nation. After the passing of the sentence on the Revd. Mr. Long, Sir Mordaunt became very unpopular with the native community of Bengal. The state of feeling of the educated native community towards Mr. Justice Wells may be gathered from the following passage which occurs in a leading article in the *Hindoo Patriot* of the 5th September, 1861 :—

“The native community was never guilty of the absurdity of denying that forgery and perjury are amongst the general catalogue of crimes in Bengal, no more than that the community of London can deny that in the highest walks of trade in that city there are occasional black-sheep who find relief from the consequence of a desperate life of iniquity and commercial turpitude at the point of a Cott’s revolver ! But what the native community seriously and substantially object to is this, it ill beseems a Judge of the highest Court in the Presidency to indulge

in foul-mouthed rhapsodies regarding the innate tendencies to forgery and perjury in the Bengali nation at large, or to insult native grand Jurors by charges which are purposely made to contain sweeping animadversions on their national character. If Sir Mordaunt Wells is really solicitous to uproot forgery and perjury from Bengal, the process could be very successfully pursued without one-tenth of the mock heroics with which the Judicial Don Quixote thinks fit to proclaim his chivalrous intentions to the world by horn and heraldry. The Don should remember that the same general law of human nature which leads even otherwise very timid men to mount a railway car with the *Times* of yesterday in his pocket, containing a harrowing account of a railway catastrophe, impels the criminal to the same dangerous track from which some few of his colleagues may have been conveyed to the hulks. Sir Mordaunt does not certainly hope to destroy a time-honored profession by transporting half a dozen unfortunate wretches who could not sin prudently. The predecessors of the Political Puisne went to work by another and a surer route. They identified themselves with popular education

and shortened their calendar by the help of the school master ! But Don Wells is too abstractedly occupied with the vanes of his windmill to hearken to the advice of sane men. His hobby is Botany Bay, and it is as impossible to drag him away from his dear River Naffe, where his windmill is at full work, as to bestow the gift of reason on a rhinoceros ! He has probably small sympathy to spend on the subject of nigger education. All his leanings are pre-occupied on the side of nigger transportation. He is evidently the destroyer, not the redeemer. We would have been quite content to take him for what he is worth if he had abstained from making a parade of his philanthropy, if only he had confined himself to the mechanical part of his office. Philanthropy with the black cap on is a cheap sort of virtue which every clown can exercise. But philanthropy amongst school boys, or at the council board or amongst examination papers, is a commodity which sensible men assess by a different standard of value. Such was the philanthropy of Ryan and of Peel, of Colville and of Seton. It never oozed out of charges to the grand Jury, but flowed spontaneously with English vigour and sincerity on examination days and educational exhibitions.—



It joined discordant races and feelings, not cut into two what was originally one ! Sir Mordaunt Wells' philanthropy is decidedly of the latter sort, since it has sown the dragon's teeth upon ground hitherto neutral. He has sacrificed the impartiality of the Judge to the zeal of the party man. He has aided and abetted the wildest conceits of a class which but for his intermeddling would have cooled down into orderly subjects. He has brought the Supreme Court into disesteem. Would it be too much to say that he is directly chargeable with the rancorous feeling that now divides two of the most important sections of Her Majesty's lieges in Bengal."

The then leaders of Bengali Society, with a view to give a lesson to this inconsiderate Judge, convened on the 26th August, 1861, a monster meeting at the house of Raja Radhakant Deb Bahadoor, where a unanimous vote of want of confidence in Sir Mordaunt Wells was passed. Kali Prossunno, though connected with many societies and associations, had never yet spoken at a public meeting of a political character. But the intensity of his feelings was so great on the present occasion, that he could not refrain from speaking out his mind in public.

This was quite in keeping with his character. At a meeting which men of the highest rank and position in society were afraid to join, it was very natural for the fearless and high-spirited Kali Prossunno to come forward and uphold the dignity of the nation, and wipe out the stigma wantonly put upon it by Sir Mordaunt Wells. The names of other independent-minded public leaders who took an active part in this meeting deserve honourable mention here. They were Raja Sir Radhakant Deb, Raja Kali Krishna Deb Bahadoor (President), Raja Pertaub Chunder Singh, Kumar Sattyanund Ghosal, Babu (afterwards Maharaja Sir) Ramanath Tagore, Babu (afterwards Sir) Jotendra Mohun Tagore, Babu Ram Gopal Ghose, Babu Debendra Nath Tagore, and Nowab Asgar Ali Khan Bahadoor. A graphic pen-picture of this agitation is given by Kali Prossunno in his inimitable *Hutum Panchar Naksha*. It bristles with his characteristic sarcasm and wit, and as these are absolutely untranslatable, we would recommend those of our readers who know Bengali to read it in the original.

According to a resolution passed at this meeting, a memorial was sent to the Secretary of

State for India, who, in reply, expressed the hope "that those who hold the Judicial office may be sensible of how great importance it is that their denunciations of crime may not be interpreted into hasty imputations against a whole people or community."

It may be noted that in after years, Sir Mordaunt Lawson Wells became so popular among the natives of Bengal that at the time of his retirement they presented him with a farewell address and bade him good-bye with a heavy heart. Among the public leaders who waited on Sir Mordaunt for presenting the address we find mention of Kali Prossunno Singh, "the most intelligent, public-spirited and generously inspired amongst the young millionaires of Calcutta." Kali Prossunno was every inch a nationalist, but he entertained no ill-feeling towards Europeans, and the above incident proves that he was always ready to give honour where honour was due, irrespective of nationality. That he did not shrink from the duty of doing honour to the same Sir Mordaunt against whom he had at one time publicly moved a vote of censure, but who had since won the respect and gratitude of our countrymen by a marked improvement in his

character and public behaviour, shows the greatness and magnanimity of Kali Prossunno's heart.

We find many other instances which prove unmistakeably that Kali Prossunno respected all true friends of India without distinction of caste, creed or color. On the occasion of the departure from India of Lord Canning, who had, after the Sepoy Muntiny, incurred the odium of the Anglo-Indians but won a throne in the grateful hearts of all Indians by his policy of clemency, Kali Prussunno did not content himself with merely joining other public leaders in presenting him with a valedictory address, but was also an active member of the Memorial Committee formed for the perpetuation of his memory, and contributed a sum of one thousand rupees to the fund.

We also find Kali Prossunno filling a conspicuous place among those leaders of our country who waited on Sir John Peter Grant, that most popular Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, who had liberated the ryots of Bengal from the thralldom of the Indigo planters, in order to present a farewell address to him on the occasion of his retirement. When, again, on the occasion of the departure from India of Captain D. L. Richardson, that great teacher, poet, critic and scholar, the

educated community of Bengal presented him with an address and a purse containing five thousand rupees, we find Kali Prossunno joining the movement and contributing handsomely to the Testimonial Fund.

Pundit Krishna Kamal Bhattacharyya has justly remarked that "no one knew better than Kali Prossunno how to make a good use of his purse." He subscribed handsomely to every fund raised for the public good. At a time when there were no arrangements for the supply of filtered water in Calcutta, Kali Prossunno presented the town with five fountains at a cost of ten thousand rupees. Kali Prossunno's charities were unostentatious—he never hankered after praise. It was for his generous heart and charitable disposition that the great philanthropist Iswar Chunder Vidyasagar loved him more than his own son. Rai Kristo Das Pal has observed somewhere that "in the heyday of his career, Kali Prossunno resembled the great Macænas in the open-handed patronage he extended to literature and to men of letters. The poor scholar, be he an old or young pundit, or an English student, always found a warm and ready friend in him."



It may be mentioned that many vernacular newspapers like the *Shome Prakash* received material pecuniary help from Kali Prossunno.

It is not possible to give an exhaustive account of Kali Prossunno's innumerable charities. We cannot, however, resist the temptation of referring to one incident which deserves to be recorded, not only as an instance of his open-handed charity but also as an interesting fact in the history of the Indigo controversy, and in the life of Hurrish Chunder Mookerjea.

In a stirring article dealing with the cruelties practised by the Indigo planters, Hurrish Chunder referred, as an instance in point, to an alleged outrage on the modesty of a woman named Haramani by one Mr. Archibald Hills. The latter, therefore, brought a suit against Hurrish Chunder for defamation in the Court of Tarruck Nath Sen, then Sudder Ameen of the 24-Per-gannahs, and claimed Rs. 10,000 as damages. Ultimately, however, Hurrish apologised and was ordered by the court to pay only the costs of the suit. Soon after this, Hurrish died and his dwelling house was about to be sold for the recovery of the costs. Grish Chunder Ghose, who was a sincere friend and collaborator of

Hurrish, tried to do his best to avert the calamity, and appealed to the country for help through the medium of the *Bengalee* of which he was the editor. But, unfortunately, some prominent members of the British Indian Association, which owed its influence and prestige to the labors of Hurrish Chunder, took up a hostile attitude and tried to dissuade the public from coming to the help of the distressed family through the columns of their organ—the *Hindoo Patriot*—then edited by Kristo Das Pal. This disgraceful conduct called forth a burst of indignation from all right-minded people. The *Bengalee*, the *Indian Field*, the *Shome Prakash* and other impartial and independent journals condemned this ungrateful attitude of the British Indian Association. We give below extracts from an article headed “How Patriots are Served” which appeared in the *Bengalee* of July 29, 1863, which will throw considerable light on the real situation.

“The slander of living men whose position is too lofty to be affected by associated gall, is still however a second rate crime compared to ingratitude towards the dead. This is a terrible charge, and we sincerely trust those who affect leadership in Bengalee intelligence, politics,

social manners, credit and progress, will come clean out of it. The dead we allude to is no other than the illustrious Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee, a gentleman to whom the British Indian Association is so deeply indebted for the intelligence, policy and traditions on the wreck of which it is now dragging a sickly existence, that we are surprised any other feelings save those of the most devoted gratitude should ever have been entertained for or exhibited towards him. The circumstance, however, which we are about to relate will send a chill of horror through the heart. We kept it back from the public so long because we believed exposure would serve no national purpose. But the destitute condition of the mother and wife of the deceased *Patriot* renders further silence on the subject a crime. It is perhaps not generally known that Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee aided the Indigo ryots not merely with his pen but also with his purse. He did not only brave the libel law for the benefit of ryots, but he fed and clothed those who personally sought the mercy of the Lieutenant Governor in Belvedere House. His private resources were heavily taxed for this public purpose, and he freely placed them at the service of his suffering

countrymen. His charities were so unobtrusive, that it was not until some long time after their exercise that the British Indian Association was informed of them, and shame compelled them to raise a fund for relieving Hurrish Chunder from further pecuniary sacrifices. The bold stand made by Baboo Joykissen Mookerjee on behalf of the *Patriot*, whose necessities he well knew, forced the Association to this measure of bare justice, and an Indigo Fund, as it was called, was placed in the hands of the individual who had devoted his life to the good cause. An account was rigidly kept by the Association of the sums expended from the fund, of which Hurrish Chunder was in other respects the sole almoner. Before the money was exhausted, Hurrish Chunder was stretched upon his death-bed. The balance was contemptible, yet his last moments were embittered by a call for an account or a refund of that balance. Consciousness had almost left him. When the demand was made, he was dying. The heartless men who had followed his leading and had become great and honorable from his reflected lustre, who had received at his hands services which no amount of gold could ever have purchased, who were once sternly answered when

they proposed him a salary, could not command sufficient decency—letting alone any higher virtue—to forbear disturbing his dying hour with a debtor and creditor statement. “Mother” said the fast sinking *Patriot*, “give those men what money they want. I cannot in my last moment look up their account, though I suspect it is incorrect. But give them the money and have done with them.” It is impossible to conceive anything more mean or inhuman than conduct like the above. If the nation had heard of it at the time it would have shrunk with horror from men who, possessing ample individual means for replacing any loss by a refusal of the heirs of the dying man to acknowledge the debt or pay it back, hesitated not to intrude upon a sacred death-bed on which flowers should have been strewn, with a mean money demand. We would have trembled for the fate of the country were we not assured that the gratitude of the British Indian Association will now receive universal execration and pass into a proverb.

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The law costs of the famous libel case against the *Patriot* threaten to deprive his bereaved mother and wife of even their homestead. A



warrant has been issued for the recovery of the amount by distress, and the British Indian Association, which scrupled not to extort from its dying colleague the debris of the Indigo Fund, calmly looks on whilst the penalty of the boldest Indigo article ever penned by Hurrish Chunder is being enforced against his widow. The ingratitude is intolerable. We call upon the country at large to deaden its incidence by affording immediate relief from this pressing difficulty."

Had it not been for the noble exertions of Grish Chunder Ghose and Kali Prossunno Singh and a few others, the dwelling house of the great Hindoo Patriot would have been sold by public auction for the realisation of the paltry sum of Rupees six hundred and odd, to the lasting disgrace of the Bengali nation. Kali Prossunno contributed a sum of Rupees one hundred, and subscriptions were also received from a few others. Grish Chunder paid the balance from his own pocket and thus saved the distressed family of Hurrish Chunder from ruin, and the national honor from an indelible stain.

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## CHAPTER VI.

LATER LITERARY LABORS. THE 'BIBIDHARTHO SANGRAHA', THE 'PARIDARSHAK' AND 'HUTUM PANCHAR NAKSHA.'

We have already dwelt in the preceding pages on the ardent love for his country which formed a conspicuous trait in Kali Prossunno's character, and pointed out that his love for the national literature was only a phase of that patriotism. He early realised that the amelioration of the national character depended entirely upon the improvement of the national literature. He therefore devoted himself from his very boyhood to the service of Bengali literature. We have already dealt with his early compositions and his efforts to improve the drama and the stage. We now proceed to give an account of his other works.

If the causes of the rapid and wonderful improvement of the Bengali literature during the last fifty years be carefully investigated, we have little doubt that the ever-increasing influence of English literature and education will be assigned a foremost place among them. It is not possible

now to appreciate fully the great benefit our literature derived, in the first stage of its period of transition, from the translation of English books. The books, etc., translated or adapted from English school books by Pundit Iswar Chunder Vidyasagar, Akshoy Kumar Dutt, K. M. Banerjea, Rajendra Lala Mitra, Rajkrishna Bannerjee and others, for use in our schools, considerably helped in the formation of modern Bengali, in fashioning the style of Bengali composition and in the dissemination of a knowledge of Western literature and science among our countrymen. The labors of the Vernacular Literature Society for the improvement of the Bengali language and the propagation of knowledge among the general public are worthy of honorable mention in this place. It was through the exertions of this society that various works on Biography, History, Science and Literature were published in Bengali, and the first Bengali magazine entitled the *Bibidhartho Sangraha* was started in imitation of the Penny Magazine in England. The first number of the magazine appeared in October, 1851. Dr. Rajendra Lala Mitra was its first editor. He conducted the magazine for six years till in 1860

he was obliged to give up the editorship for want of leisure. The degree of popularity which this magazine achieved among the Bengali boys and girls at that time will be evident from the following extract from the Autobiographical Reminiscences of Sir Rabindra Nath Tagore :

“Rajendra Lala Mitra used to edit an illustrated monthly magazine called the *Bibidhartho Sangraha*. A bound volume of the magazine was kept on the book-shelf of my third brother. I got hold of it. I still remember the delight with which I read it over and over again. I spent many a holiday lying down on my back in our bed with the great big square volume on my breast and reading from it the account of the Norwhal, the amusing stories of Kazis' decisions and the story of Krishnakumari.”

Who can say how far this small monthly magazine contributed to the development of Rabindranath's intellectual powers?

He again observes :—

“How is it that there is no such paper now-a-days? The magazines of to-day are filled with scientific, philosophical and historical essays on the one hand, and tales, poems and uninteresting accounts of travels on the other. I do not find

a single popular paper which the general public can read with pleasure and profit. Most of the English magazines, such as *Chambers's Journal*, *Cassell's Magazine*, *Strand Magazine*, are meant for the people at large. They are regularly supplying the whole country with (what may be called) common rice and coarse clothing from the stores of knowledge. These are most useful to the majority of mankind."

Kali Prossunno appreciated the usefulness of this paper and did not allow it to be discontinued. He was connected with the paper even during the editorship of Rajendra Lala. The reviews of books, etc., written by him for this magazine shew his wonderful command over language and critical powers. Upon the resignation of the editorship of the paper by Rajendra Lala, Kali Prossunno himself assumed the editorial charge of the magazine as we learn from the following extract from the *Indian Field* of July 6, 1861.

"The *Bibidhartho Sangraha*, a Bengalee illustrated monthly periodical, which was stopped for sometime since, has been revived under the auspices of Babu Kali Prossunno Singh of Jorasanko. This paper is one of the best of its kind and was at first edited by Babu Rajendralall



Mitra, the well-known Director of the Ward's Institution and a native gentleman of large and various ability. We trust it will maintain the reputation under the management of Babu Kally Prosonno Sing."

Kali Prossunno began to edit the Magazine from Baisakh,, 1782 *Saka*, corresponding to April, 1860. How long he edited this journal we have not been able to ascertain. We have not been able to lay our hands on all the numbers issued during his editorship, so we cannot satisfy the curiosity of our readers as to his own contributions to it.

In 1267 B.E., corresponding to 1860-1 A.D., Pundits Jaganmohun Turkalankar and Madan Gopal Goswami founded a Bengali daily named *Paridarshak*. In reviewing this paper in the *Bibidhartho Sangraha*, Kali Prossunno, while hailing with delight the appearance of a daily paper in Bengali, observed that its dimensions were too small and suggested to the proprietors that the size of the paper might be enlarged for the benefit of the public even at a sacrifice. It was, however, beyond the means of the proprietors to carry out the suggestion, and ultimately Kali Prossunno, who was always ready to sacrifice

time, labor and money for the good of the public, himself took over the management of the paper, and during his editorship the paper showed much improvement both in its size and in its contents. It was on 1st Agrahayan, 1269 B.E., that Kali Prossunno assumed the editorship of the paper with Pundit Jaganmohun Turkalankar and Babu Bhuban Mohun Mukherjee as his assistants. In the *Shomeprakash* of 10th Agrahayan, 1269 B.E., Pundit Dwarkanath Vidyabhusan, in noticing the change in the editorship and the alteration in size of the *Paridarshak*, observed as follows:—

“From the 1st of Agrahayan of this year, there has been a change in the editorship of the *Paridarshak* and its size has been enlarged. Both these changes have been a source of delight to us. *Paridarshak* is a daily paper. Readers expect to learn much from daily papers, but the size of the paper had hitherto been so small that there was little means of gratifying their desire. Now the size has been increased and many useful things may now find a place in it. A second cause of our delight is that Babu Kali Prossunno Singh has taken over charge of the editorship. He takes a great interest in the improvement of the Bengali language. He does not care for

profit. There is no fear of his being discouraged by any falling-off in the income of the paper. To conduct a large daily paper entails considerable expense, but through God's grace he has sufficient means to bear it. We have carefully perused a few numbers of the *Paridarshak* from the very beginning. Almost all the articles published in it are highly interesting."

In a leading article of the first number of the *Paridarshak* under its new management, Kali Prossunno's views regarding vernacular journalism are very well expressed. We give below a translation of this article of Kali Prossunno's which may be read with profit even at the present day :—

"Most of our countrymen do not show much respect for newspapers, many of them do not appreciate their usefulness. Those who know English seem to show great eagerness in reading newspapers, but their curiosity is fully gratified by the reading of English newspapers alone. Even where English newspapers are not available, they consider it beneath their dignity to read Bengali newspapers. The reason is that the contents of Bengali newspapers are generally

stale and unprofitable. They are often filled with translations of news from English papers which have become a month old. Some of them may, without injustice, be described as translations of a portion only of some English newspaper. Some editors engage themselves in pleasing their readers instead of benefiting them. There is no Bengali newspaper which is not, in some way or other, dependent on some English newspaper. Besides, the facilities for collecting news and other advantages which English papers enjoy are not open to Bengali newspapers. Hence those who are acquainted with English seldom care to read Bengali papers. This, however, is a great mistake of theirs, for the manners and customs of the Bengalis are altogether different from those of Englishmen, and things which Englishmen consider highly objectionable may be viewed in quite a different light by us on considerations of place and circumstance. Besides, the information as to when such and such a vessel arrives at such and such a place or leaves Calcutta for England, may be useful to Englishmen, but what good purpose does it serve for Bengalis? In short, it cannot be expected that the contents of English papers should be more suitable and instructive to

Bengalis than those of Bengali papers. Englishmen are not acquainted like the Bengalis with the manners, customs, and character of the people of this country, and hence the former cannot hope to guide and enlighten us so easily as Bengali editors. Besides, newspapers should be published in the language which is generally understood by the public, for by that means the public can sooner judge the faults and merits of any scheme proposed for the benefit of the public. The size of most of the few Bengali newspapers now in existence is too small, so that all matters suitable for publication in newspapers can find no room in them. For this reason we have enlarged the size of the *Paridarshak*. It shall contain such matters suitable to Bengali readers as cannot find a place in other papers of a smaller size. We shall do our best to remove all the defects that have made the Bengali papers distasteful to the public. We resolve not to swerve from the path of truth—to avoid exaggeration to the best of our abilities, and though it is not possible for any human being to be altogether free from bias, we promise to be thoroughly impartial in our judgment of men and things. We shall always endeavour to remove national prejudices and superstitions—to improve



the condition of our country—to impart the light of knowledge to the ignorant and to prevent tyranny and oppression by the wicked and the powerful over the weak and the innocent. These shall be our principal aims. We are not altogether a stranger to our readers—we have been serving the cause of Bengali literature from our boyhood—though it is not for us to say how far we have been successful. But so far we may be allowed to hope at present, that should the patriotic gentlemen of our country lend us their support and encouragement, it will not be long before we attain our ends and objects.”

We believe that Kristo Das Pal had this paper in view when he said “He also started a first class vernacular daily newspaper, the like of which we have not yet seen.”

In 1862, the first part of the *Hutum Panchar Naksha* came out of the press. Shortly afterwards, the second part was also published. It consists of a series of vivid—almost photographic—pen-pictures from real life illustrating the manners, customs, vices and foibles of the Bengali society of that time, and is written in colloquial Bengali after the style of *Allaler Gharer Dulal* of Tek Chand Thakoor (Peary Chand Mittra).

In an essay on "Bengali Literature" contributed by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee to the *Calcutta Review* in 1871, that great Cham of Bengali Literature observed :

"From Tek Chand to '*Hutum*' is an easy transition. For Kali Prossunno Singh or '*Hutum*' was one of the *most successful writers in the style first introduced by Tek Chand*. In early youth he made several translations from the Sanskrit, and in particular he is the author of a translation of the *Mahabharata*, which may be regarded as the greatest literary work of his age. But it is not as a translator that he is known to fame, and familiar to almost every Bengali, but as the author of *Hutum Pancha*, a collection of sketches of city-life, something after the manner of Dickens' *Sketches by Boz*, in which the follies and peculiarities of all classes, and not seldom of men actually living, are described in racy, vigorous language, not seldom disfigured by obscenity. Among them are the *Charak Puja*, the *Bárah Yári*, *Popular Excitements*, *Charlatancy*, *Babu Padma Lochan Dutta* or the *Sudden Incarnation*, and *Snan Jatra*."

To give the readers an idea of the style of *Hutum*, we gladly avail ourselves of Bankim

Chunder's rendering of the following passages selected by him to illustrate the observations quoted above :

[The scene is laid in the native quarter of Calcutta after nightfall.]

“The noise of the bell and the brass-worker has ceased to proclaim that it is still early. The lamps in every street are lighted. Bel flowers and ice-cream and curds are offered for sale by loud-voiced hawkers. The front doors of wine-shops are closed as the law directs, but men who wish to buy are not sent away empty. Gradually the darkness thickens. At this time, thanks to English shoes, striped Santipur scarfs and Simla dhutis, you can't tell high from low. Groups of fast young men with peals of laughter and plenty of English talk, are knocking at this door and that. They left home when they saw the lamps lighted in the evening, and will return when the flour-mills begin to work. They haunt in crowds the poultry-market in Machua Bazar and the crossing in Chor Bagan Street. Some cover their faces with scarfs, and think that no one recognizes them. Others shout, cough, sneeze, and otherwise display their exuberant spirits. The office clerk has washed his hands and face

and taken his brief evening meal, and is now busy with his guitar. In the next room little boys are bawling out their lessons from Vidyasagar's spelling book. Goldsmiths have lighted their small earthen lamps, and are preparing to set about their business. The cloth merchants, braziers, and furniture dealers have shut their shops for the night ; and the money-changer is counting his cash and estimating his gains. Fishwomen in the decaying Sobha Bazar market are selling—lamps in hand—their stores of putrid fish and salted *hilsa*, and coaxing purchasers by calling out, "You fellow with the napkin on your shoulder, will you buy some fine fish?" "You fellow with a moustache like a broom, will you pay four annas?" Some one, anxious to display his gallantry, is rewarded by hearing something unpleasant of his ancestors. Smokers of *madat* and *ganjah*, and drunkards who have drunk their last pice, are bawling out, "Generous men, pity a poor blind Brahman," and so procure the wherewithal for a new debauch. \* \* \* \* It is the evening of the *Nila*, and a Saturday, and the city is unusually crowded. Hanging lanterns and wall-lamps shed their light in the betel shops. The air is full of the scent of the flowers hawked about

the streets. In some houses over the street, lessons are being given in dancing, and passers-by stand open-mouthed below enjoying the tinkling music. On one side a fight is going on. A constable has caught a thief and is dragging him away with his hands tied ; other thieves are laughing and enjoying the fun, and blessing their stars for their own good luck, quite forgetting that their turn will come some other day."

[In the morning the scene is changed :—]

'Ding-dong, ding-dong, sounds the clock in the Church. It is four in the morning, and night-wandering Babus have turned their faces homewards. Oorya Brahmans are at work on the flour-mills. Street lamps are growing faint. Light breezes are blowing. Quails are singing in the verandas of the night-houses. But for this, or when the crows begin to caw, or a street dog occasionally barks for want of something else to do, the city is still silent. By-and-by you see groups of women going to the river-side to bathe, and discussing among themselves the fact that Ram's mother cannot walk, that the fourth daughter-in-law in another house is a shrew, and that another woman is hideous. Butchers from Chitpore are coming in with loads of mutton.



Police sergeants, darogahs and jamadars, and other specimens of the 'terror of the poor,' who have finished their rounds, are walking back to their stations with sounding steps, their girdles and pockets filled with rupees, small silver and pice. They are not too proud to accept a bit of fuel, a chillum of tobacco, or a roll of pan. Some are coming back angry with the city because it has disappointed their hopes, and are busy revolving in their minds the best means of making some rich man feel their dignity and power.

Loud booms the morning gun. The crows are cawing noisily, and leaving their nightly shelter. Shop-keepers open their shutters, bow before Gandheswari, sprinkle Ganges water on the floor, change the water in their hookas and begin to smoke. Gradually day dawns, fishermen are hurrying along with baskets of fish. Fisherwomen are quarrelling and running after them. Baskets of potatoes and brinjals from Baidyabati are coming in. The messengers of death, foreign and native, are starting in their round of visits in gari or palki, according to their condition, without a smile in their faces unless fever or cholera is rife. \* \* \*

Pundits from the *toles* and pujaris are going to

bathe in the river with a change of clothes in bundles under their arms. They are in a hurry today because they must be with their jujmans early. Rheumatic middle-aged gentlemen are out in their morning walks. Oorya bearers, with tooth-stick in hand, are off like the rest to the water-side. The *Englishman*, the *Hurkaru* and the *Phœnix* are being distributed to their subscribers. Native papers are like venison ; they are kept for a day to get a flavour. It is different with English papers ; they must be distributed before the sun is up.'

The book bristles with flashes of wit and humour and stinging sarcasm—for which it has never been surpassed by any other Bengali production of the kind. The veil which covered the personalities aimed at was so thin that it was not difficult to discover who they were. This circumstance caused the book to be looked at with disfavor in some quarters, but it heightened the enjoyment of the general public. It was this feature of the book that elicited from Bunkim Chunder Chatterjee the remark that the book originated in malice. But that this was not so is proved by the fact that, while showing up the follies and foibles of the great men of his time, the

author did not hesitate to exhibit to his readers his own faults and eccentricities. As observed by Kristo Das Pal :—"In those sketches he did not spare himself, for no picture in that portrait gallery is more faithful than his own."

Those who have not read any other writings of Kali Prossunno than *Hutum Panchar Naksha*, and have a notion that the translation of the *Mahabharat* was wholly done by the Pundits engaged by him, naturally suppose that Kali Prossunno never wrote in the polished Bengali style adopted by Sanskrit scholars like Vidyasagar and others but always followed that of Tek Chand Thakoor (Peary Chand Mittra) as his model. But this supposition is erroneous. Kali Prossunno was really partial towards chaste and refined Bengali. He wrote *Hutum* in what is called *Allali* style because it was more suitable to the character of the work. If the sketches of *Hutum* had been written in the highly polished style of the Pundits it could not have achieved so much popularity.

The following extracts from a review of the *Sketches by Hutum* which appeared in the Hindoo Patriot of the 24th November, 1862, will show how the work was received by the educated

community at a time when the Sanscritists held supreme dominion over the realm of Bengali literature :—

“We owe our friend *Hutum* some apology for not being able to take an earlier notice of his excellent sketches than now. It is not however too late to review a work which possesses merit enough to retain something more than an ephemeral interest. *Hootum's* performance will be read with equal interest by both the two classes of readers into which the reading community may be generally divided—first, those who read for excitement and fun, and secondly, those whose pleasure consists in watching the progress of the Bengali language. We can assure our friend that the ill-favored visage and ominous hootings for which the other members of his race are regarded with suspicion will in his case prove an exception. His effusions are inviting and possess beauty sufficiently attractive to call for a repetition. He has opened a new vein in the mine of Bengali literature which bids fair to yield rich treasures. We do not attach so much importance to his work for the lively and life-like pictures which he presents, as for the new species of composition which he introduces. When we say new, we are

not to be understood as meaning that it is an invention. The style is new so far as that term may be applied to a department of composition not in vogue in the current Bengali literature. The authors who have enriched the infant literature of our country with their contributions, have committed a great mistake in bringing into vogue a style of composition ill-adapted to the taste of the generality of the community. Their language is not the language of the people, and it is matter for little wonder that their works sank into oblivion as soon as they were ushered into the world ; the same fate awaits all who commit the same mistake. It is as much necessary that the litterateurs should, by their cultivated taste, refine and remodel the language which they adopt for their medium of thought, as that they should also in turn imbibe the spirit of that language. In fact all improvement must be conditional on their adherence to this one important principle—they may beautify by wearing off the corners or retouching a part here and there, but any attempt at introducing something new will always prove futile. They may create a language of their own but it will not be the language of the people. We do not say that the style of *Hutum*



will suit all departments of composition whether in didactic literature or instructive science, but we may venture to hold it up as a model for general imitation. It will require the skill of a masterhand to adapt it to different occasions according to the fitness of them. It is flexible enough to be moulded into any shape so as to combine elegance with ease, [clearness] with classic chastity. The language of Pundits is not the language which suits the general reader,—that string of discordant sesquipedal unpronounceable words and phrases is always so repulsive as to make the books in which they occur to all but the savants mere literary curiosities. We want books which one might read as he runs—books which will create a taste for reading by themselves being the medium of instruction, rather than books which presuppose previous learning on the part of their readers.

*Hutum's* style is highly idiomatic and eminently popular. It is the style of the Bengali language, the style in which we all speak and for which every Bengali will have some sympathy.

\* \* \* It has been affirmed that *Hutum's* pictures are sometimes too personal ; we do not know how far this is true. But he cannot escape

the odium which those writers must incur who aim at lashing follies as they rise. His pictures are vivid and truthful—they are sometimes so faithful as representations of current weaknesses that many will be pointed at as having sat for their portraits. \* \* \*

Pundit Ramgati Nyayratna, the first historian of the Bengali Language and Literature, says that the “Sketches of *Hutum Pancha*” is a unique production and gives a clear idea of the state of Calcutta society of the time both in its internal and external aspects.

Rajnarain Bose—another scholar and litterateur of the time—says that the work exhibits great comic power and the sketches are life-like. The vivid pictures painted by Kali Prossunno of the Bengali society of the time are indeed priceless. They were valued not only as faithful representations of life but also for the castigation which they dealt out to those hypocrites and double-dealers who were the bane of our society, and drove them back again into the path of honesty and sincerity.

Rajah Benoy Krishna Deb Bahadur observes in his *History of the Growth of Calcutta*—

“His comical and satirical social sketch, the

*Hutum Pancha*, graphically delineates in a humorous vein several points, good and bad, of the state of society which prevailed at the time. It is a masterpiece of its kind and has never been eclipsed by the latter-day productions in the line. Time may come when one may not read *Hutum Pancha*, but the time will never come when it will fail to give pleasure and profit to its readers."

Pundit Krishna Kamal Bhattacharyya also says in his *Reminiscences* that "the book has a great value. Considerable humour and thorough knowledge of men are exhibited in the *Hutum Pancha*. \* \* \* As an early specimen of that type of writing it deserves not to be forgotten, and it is much better than the writings of Iswar Chunder Gupta and Goorgooray Bhattacharyya in point of taste."

That eminent man of letters Babu Akshoy Kumar Sirkar said from the Presidential Chair of the Sixth Bengal Literary Conference :—"Peary Chand showed us for the first time that beautiful prose could be written in pure and simple style. The name of Kali Prossunno Singh should also be mentioned in this connection. Bankim Babu was editing the works of Babu Peary Chand

Mittra and so he had no occasion to say anything about Kali Prossunno. We have now to supply the omission. We were then mere boys, when *Hutum Panchar Naksha* appeared. We were charmed with the novelty of his style and the playful humour of his composition. Then it was that we learnt for the first time that our mother-tongue was capable of all the varieties of literary pyrotechnics and was lithe in every limb."

The learned editor of the *Viswakosha* gives credit to Kali Prossunno Singh as the originator of the Blank Verse in Bengali, he having in his dedication of the second part of the *Hutum Pancha* to the public used this form of verse ; but this is apparently erroneous, because Michael Madhusudan Dutt had already published his *Tilottama* (in 1860) and *Meghnad Badh* (in 1861) when *Hutum Pancha* saw the light (in 1862).

But Kali Prossunno was the first to appreciate the capabilities of the blank verse and the genius of Michael M. S. Dutt, whom he hailed as a great poet. In reviewing the *Meghnad Badh*—deemed by many as the greatest epic poem in modern Bengali literature, in the *Bibidhartho Sangraha* he observed :—

"That such a poem would ever appear in

Bengali literature was perhaps never dreamed even by Saraswati (the goddess of learning).

'Sweet music of the thrilling Bin  
With raptures oft mine ears did greet ;  
And heard I oft the cuckoo sing  
Among fresh leaves of juicy Spring ;  
But never heard I earthly being  
Give voice to words so honey-sweet.'

It is a pity that many of our countrymen have not yet been able to appreciate Michael Madhu Sudan Dutt. It is the way of the world that we don't make much of those objects of our affection which are always at hand. It is only their absence that reminds us of their good qualities and make us feel the pangs of separation from them. It is then that we feel the stings of remorse and try to perpetuate their memory in a way that never occurred to us when they were present among us.

Whatever poems Michael Madhu Sudan Dutt will produce during his life-time shall add lustre to Bengali literature. People take infinite trouble to dive into the sea and bring up pearls which they set in their ornaments and think a great deal of. We have been blessed with jewels



beyond the dreams of our fancy which we have come by without any effort on our part and at home. It is now open to us either to convert them into ornaments for our head or to treat them as rubbish. Such treatment, however, will not diminish their value but only make us the laughing stock of the public for our ignorance."

In another article, Kali Prossunno gave Michael a higher place than Homer, Virgil and Milton. The Rev. Lal Behari Day, who was saturated with the spirit of western literature, took exception to this, and in language that exceeded the bounds of courtesy, wrote in the *Indian Reformer*, edited by him—

"The Editors of the *Vividartha Sangraha*, in their blind admiration of Mr. Dutt, prefer his poetry to that of Homer, Virgil and Milton. We can only account for this singular perversity of taste by supposing that the gentlemen, who have sat themselves up as Judges on the Bengali republic of letters, have never read intelligently a line of the Greek or Latin or English Bard."

In the *Hindoo Patriot* of March 17, 1862, the cudgels were taken up on behalf of Kali Prossunno by Grish Chunder Ghose who wrote as follows :—

"We have no quarrel with the *Indian Reformer* for failing to recognize in the author of Meghnada the "genuine afflatus of a poet." For we are no literary bigots and can sail sociably on the stream of opinion with a neighbour, even though he should hoist antagonistic colours. But we have a right to rebuke our brother when he allows his own ignorance of the higher philosophy of criticism to lead him to insult a learned body of his countrymen. \* \*

We presume our contemporary is scholar enough to know that when Virgil had written but a small part of his imperishable epic, a contemporary poet (Propertius) wrote

"Cedite Romani Scriptores ; Cedite Graii !"

Was not this assigning the Mantuan a loftier seat in the temple of the Muses than that of the Laurel'd father of European Poetry? What modern critic has upheld this preposterous preference? But what modern critic reads the *Aeneid* with the ardent feelings of a Roman of the Augustan age? Again, shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe, a great body of Italian critics contended that the

"Tuscan Father's Comedy Divine"

was superior to Iliad. What modern echoes

those opinions now? Our contemporary cannot but know what a certain section of the British people think of Milton. We believe Dr. Duff and others have more than once called that Poet "the greatest of uninspired writers."

Now—how are we to account for "this singular perversity of taste?" The fact is—every poet worthy the name, instinctively seizes upon subjects which are so mixed up with the feelings of his nation as to be a sort of chord of the great national heart. Hence the enthusiasm he inspires, the glowing admiration with which he is read.

We are great admirers of the three illustrious poets our contemporary names. And we hope we can read them "intelligently", but neither "the wrath of stern Achilles on his foe pursued, thrice fugitive about Troy Wall, nor rage of Turnus for Laurinia dispossessed, or Neptune's ire or Juno's love that so long perplexed the Greek and Cytherea's son," have half the interest for us as the distresses and triumphs of our own Ram Chandra! We do not mean to be understood to say that Mr. Dutt, whose name has been so strongly mixed up with those of the illustrious Poetical Triad of Europe, has acquitted himself

so ably as to challenge comparison with those mighty Poets ; but we are sure that no Bengali, unless he has undergone a complete process of denationalization like the *Reformer* will prefer Helen, Dido, Eve, Andromache and Hecuba—all beautiful in themselves—to *Sita, Pramila, Mandodory and Soroma*. When one of the editors of the *Vividartha* spoke of the parting scene between *Pramila* and *Indrajit* on terms that were only due to a similar scene in the *Iliad*, he yielded to his feelings as a man, born far away from “Fair Greece” and on the banks of the Ganges. He read words which his ears drink in with rapture every day, and not words for which he has to turn to his *Lexicon* and *Clairs*.

The fact is the Poetry of each nation has distinctive natural features, and the writer who can retain those distinctive features in his poetry, is sure to be the darling of his nation and may exultingly say “*non omnis moriar.*” We freely confess that it is not our object to fight for Mr. Dutt, and as for the Editors of the *Vividartha*, they know how to return scorn for scorn and blow for blow. But we cannot refrain from saying that we fancy the *Reformer* has not read Mr. Dutt’s poetry with the attention it has a right to

expect from educated Bengalees, and that if he has, he has forgotten those days when he sat on his mother's lap, and heard those beautiful legends that shed a halo of glory around our country and people, and are our only inalienable wealth ! If the *Reformer* has no sympathy with anything that is Hindoo, all that we can do is to bow him out of the room politely.

One word more. If there be any light in Mr. Dutt it is borrowed light, for his Poem is a mere echo of the Divine *Ramayana*, though lavishly *Homerized*. You have the ancient Hindoo style of architecture with Doric and Corinthian innovations.—We are far from questioning our contemporary's knowledge of the Greek language, and yet we doubt if he can read a single line in Homer "intelligently." Does he ever faint when reading the Greek Poet as did the Rhapsodists of old when reciting him ? Will the *Reformer* give even a cowry to a man for reciting to him those famous lines in Virgil,—"*Ta Marcellinus avais !*" etc., and yet *Octavia* gave the Bard *ten Ses'erces* for each line !

Being neither Greeks nor Romans, nor believers in the Mosaic account of creation, the Editors of the *Vividartha* need not blush if a



Hindoo legend stirs up their feelings more than the poetry of Homer, Virgil and Milton. We should certainly call them silly, if they did violence to their feelings, in order to show the world how very thoroughly they had been 'regenerated !' "

We have had no opportunity of seeing what reply, if any, was given to Lal Behari's criticism in the *Bibidhar'ho Sangraha* itself.

Although the general Bengali public—who are always averse to changes of any kind—hesitated to acknowledge the genius of Michael Madhu Sudan Dutt, and some of them were severely criticising the new form and style introduced by him into Bengali literature, Kali Prossunno who was a keen appreciator of merit could not refrain from publicly honoring the rising poet. He publicly encouraged Madhu Sudan by presenting him from the *Bidyo'shahinee Sabha* as representing the educated community of Bengal with a beautiful address and a richly chased silver wine-glass. The biographer of Madhu Sudan has justly remarked that the honor done by Kali Prossunno to Michael Madhu Sudan Dutt was a rich reward to his genius.

Although Kali Prossunno possessed a fearless

and independent spirit and always suited his actions to his own conscience—irrespective of the frowns or censure of Government officials or his own countrymen, he succeeded in winning the respect and esteem of all by the simplicity, sincerity, fearlessness and outspokenness of his character. He held such a high place in society that when, in 1863, Honorary Magistrates were created for the second time, Kali Prossunno was appointed an Honorary Magistrate and Justice of the Peace of Calcutta. He was also elected a Commissioner of the Suburban Municipality. It appears from the following extract from the *Hindoo Patriot* of the 12th February, 1866, that for sometime Kali Prossunno also performed the highly responsible duties of the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta—

“Mr. Branson has taken one month’s privilege leave, and Babu Kali Prossunno Sing, Honorary Magistrate, officiates for him.”

It may be mentioned that the position of a Magistrate commanded great respect and influence in those days, and only men of the highest rank and intelligence were selected for the post.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE MAHABHARAT.

Having given our readers, in the preceding chapters, some account of Kali Prossunno's patriotism and early literary labors, we now proceed to say a few words about that noblest monument of his genius—the Bengali translation of the *Mahabharat*—the greatest epic that the world has ever seen in any age or country.

It is not known when and how the grand idea of translating the entire Mahabharat from Sanskrit into Bengali first entered the mind of Kali Prossunno. It is said that Kali Prossunno himself translated a portion of the great epic and expressed to his guardian Haru Chunder Ghose his desire of publishing a translation of the entire work in Bengali. Haru Chunder encouraged him in this laudable enterprise but as this colossal undertaking could not be accomplished by a single man, even if he devoted his whole life to it, he advised him to take the assistance of Sanskrit Pundits. Pundit Iswar Chunder Vidyasagar had been publishing in the *Tattwabodhinee Patrika*—an elegant Bengali translation of a portion of the

great epic in instalments. Kali Prossunno considering him the fittest person to help him in this matter asked him to undertake the work. Vidya-sagar pleaded want of leisure, but arranged for the translation of the *Mahabharat* by other eminent Pundits and consented to supervise their work in person.

Kali Prossunno was only eighteen years old when the work was undertaken. In the Postscript to the *Mahabharat* he says—

“In 1780 *Saka* I undertook to translate the *Mahabharat* from the original Sanskrit into Bengali with the help of seven learned colleagues with the object of doing good to my native country and leaving a good name. Since then I have labored continuously with great perseverance for a period of eight years and by the boundless grace of Providence my long-cherished undertaking has at last been brought to a successful termination, by the completion of the translation of the eighteen *Parvas* of the *Mahabharat*. How far the translation will prove acceptable to the public will depend upon the judgment of our kind readers and the sympathetic public. But we may assure our readers that in translating the *Mahabharat* no passage of the original text has

been left out and that we have not added any embellishment of our own to any portion of it, although we have tried our best to preserve the grace and elegance of the original and to avoid the defects which are generally noticed in translations from one language to another.

The house at Chitpore where the work of translation was carried on was called the *Saraswatasram* and the *Puran Sangraha* Office.

Our readers may well realise the Herculean labour involved in the task and the great pains taken by Kali Prossunno and his pundits, when they remember that in those days no printed copies of Sanskrit works existed and even manuscript copies—which had to be procured with very great difficulty owing to the unwillingness of the Pundits to part with such sacred books—were rarely to be found in a complete condition, and these again showed such a variety of readings that it entailed a considerable expenditure of labor and discrimination to find out the correct readings. It is worthy of note that this most difficult task of comparing the different readings and ascertaining and adopting the correct one was entrusted to Pundit Taranath Tarkabachaspati—whose fame as a Sanskrit



scholar spread far and wide from one end of the country to another when he published his voluminous Sanskrit Dictionary—the *Bachaspatya Brihat Abhidhan* after continuous labour for twelve years and at a cost of nearly eighty thousand rupees. The names of other learned Pundits who materially assisted Kali Prossunno in this noble work are worthy of mention in this place :—

Abhaya Charan Tarkalankar

Krishnadhan Vidyaratna

Ram Sebak Vidyalkar

Hem Chandra Vidyaratna—the well-known translator of the *Ramayana*.

Kali Prossunno also received many useful suggestions and encouragement from the following gentlemen :

Raja Sir Radha Kant Dev Bahadur

Rajah (afterwards Maharaja) Komul Krishna Dev Bahadur

Pundit Iswar Chander Vidyasagar

Pundit Gungadhar Turkobagish

Baboo (afterwards Maharaja Sir) Joteendra Mohun Tagore

Baboo (afterwards Raja) Rajendra Lala Mitra  
Pundit Dwarkanath Vidyabhusan, Editor of  
the *Shomeprokash*

Baboo Rajkrishna Banerjea, Professor of Bengali,  
Presidency College, Calcutta

Baboo Nobin Krishna Banerjea—Editor of the  
*Tattwabodhinee Patrika*

Baboo (afterwards Rai Bahadur) Dinobundhoo  
Mitra, Author of the *Nil Durpan*

Pundit Khetter Mohun Vidyaratna, Editor of the  
*Bhaskar*

Baboo Raj Kristo Mitra, and others.

The work was most fittingly dedicated to Her  
most gracious Majesty the Queen Victoria (of  
blessed memory) in the following terms—

“Noble Queen !

When the sun of prosperity of any country in  
this world begins to rise, the Goddess of Fortune  
of that country attaches herself to the person of  
some great and high-souled being. It is a law  
of nature that when a country is on the path of  
progress—it is ruled by sovereigns who love their  
subjects and combine in their person the noblest  
qualities of manhood. By the grace of God, that  
auspicious day has now dawned upon long-  
suffering India. The British nation—always

noted for their love of justice—has liberated India from the terrible jaws of the Moghul Emperors, who like Rahu\*, had eclipsed her glory when by the decree of Providence their empire established on the ruins of Hindu Kingdoms came to an end. Now from day to day her pale face is regaining brilliancy like the sun and her sons consider themselves supremely blessed under the shadow of thy loving affection and mercy.

O goddess ! Noticing this auspicious moment and actuated by a desire to do good to my country, I set about with great ardour to translate faithfully the Sanscrit *Mahabharat* of Maharshi Vedavyasa into Bengali. Now, after eight years of incessant labor my long-cherished self-imposed task has, by the grace of God, been completed. It is not meet that this flower of literature produced by eight years' hard labor and care should be left in some lonely spot unstirred by breath of air. Besides, an unrivalled work like the *Mahabharat* is not fit to be inscribed with any other name than that of the mighty Queen and Empress of Bharat (India). As the gods of old

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\*According to Hindu Mythology, the eclipse of the Sun is caused by his being devoured by *Rahu*—a demon.

after churning the Ocean with great labor raised the Parijat flower from its bottom and presented it to their king Purandar, so I offer to thee this blooming lotus of the *Mahabharat* which I have succeeded in bringing up after such great labor and devotion.

Empress of India ! In conclusion I pray to God that as in the days of Raja Vikramaditya, world-renowned poets like Kalidas were born to adorn and improve Sanscrit literature in India, and as during the reign of Queen Elizabeth in England, Shakespeare and other famous poets appeared and by their transcendent poetical powers made her reign memorable, so may during thy reign, great geniuses appear in India and light up hundreds of lamps of Sanscrit literature to drive away the darkness of ignorance from the land and to illuminate the world.

With these words

I remain,

O Great Queen !

Your ever-loyal subject & humble servant,

KALI PROSSUNNO SINGH."

Kali Prossunno distributed *gratis*, three thousand copies of the *Mahabharat* among his literate countrymen. The printing of Bengali books was, in those days, a hundred times more expensive than it is in the present day and it is said that about two and a half lakhs of rupees were spent in publishing and distributing this voluminous work. The free distribution of so many copies of such a valuable and colossal work is without a parallel in the history of Bengali literature—or indeed of any literature. It is worthy of note that the recipients of the gift were exempted even from postage charges etc. for we learn from old files of the *Tattwabodhinee Patrika* that agents were appointed in different parts of the country and a notification was published over the signature of Radhanath Vidyaratna, Secretary to the *Bidyotshahinee Sabha* requesting people not to send any postage stamps or cost of transmission but to obtain the books from the agents direct.

The names of the learned Pundits who assisted Kali Prossunno in the translation of the *Mahabharat* and of the eminent personages who encouraged him in the undertaking are gratefully mentioned in the Post script to the *Mahabharat*.



An impression prevails among our countrymen that the work of translation was all done by Pundits and Kali Prossunno had little to do with it. But this is erroneous. Kristo Das Pal says—

“We have been assured by friends who were in his confidence, that some of the finest specimens of Bengali in the translation of the *Mahabharatha* were from his pen.”

The fact that the style and diction of this voluminous work is uniform from start to finish in its elegance and polish also attests the personal supervision and care of the Editor and the part he bore in the work.

The appearance of the first part of the *Mahabharat* was welcomed by the public with great delight and elicited high praise from the Local Press. The *Bibidhartho Sangraha*, then edited by Dr. Rajendra Lala Mitra, highly extolled the work and encouraged the youthful editor. The *Hindoo Patriot* of Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee, in its issue of May 12, 1860, reviewed the first part of the *Mahabharat* in the following terms :

“As we think we speak. The mode of our thoughts moulds and fashions our language.

Language takes its tincture, nay its very shape and substance, from our thoughts. It is poetical sweet or harsh just as our ideas are lofty, tender or grovelling. It is not every language which can give adequate expression to every thought. Even an approximate approach towards propriety can hardly be expected. This is specially the case with translations. To preserve the sentiments entire, to express the peculiar manner in which they are set forth, to subdue our language to serve us in tracing the thoughts of another, to present those thoughts in the same train as would excite the identical sentiments, or touch the self-same chord of our feeling which the perusal of the original would achieve, are works of uncommon difficulty. The very thing "to follow" is foreign to our nature. But here we should not only follow the grand master slavishly in all his peculiarities, but love his very deformity. The capacity of a particular language in giving full exposition to a particular train of thought cannot be denied. The words adapted in one language to express a particular thought, will find no corresponding words in another, and in case they do find a synonym it happens to be vague and indistinct or too inappropriate to be

up to the mark. The historic importance of a word of a particular language, its intrinsic worth, its capability of rousing a particular train of thought, of waking remote associations, of recalling into life ideas which long seemed buried, it loses when rendered into another language how akin soever the two may be. Like exotic plants they fade in a foreign clime. The words which can call spirits from the deep in one tongue, will dwindle into unmeaning jargon in another. It is hard to contemplate the lot of a translator. It becomes intolerable to reflect that there is no glory in success, but burning shame attendant on failure.

In such a task has Baboo Kali Prossunno Singh embarked. We were by no means disposed to be charitable towards the translator or his work when we began with the perusal of the book before us. We almost vowed to wreak vengeance upon the daring translator for his boldness and for an attempt almost sacrilegious and which we then thought was almost beyond reach. To translate the *Mahabharat* into the prose of our country was to our conception an almost impossible task. We could not reconcile ourselves to the idea of beholding the grand epic of yore degraded to

slovenly prose. But we were agreeably disappointed. Page after page flew, and the more and more we were attracted to the book as if by a secret spell. It afforded us infinite delight to contemplate the beauties of Vyasa in our native tongue. To render into the vernacular the classic works of Vyasa is an adventurous undertaking. To preserve the beauties of the original, to subdue the tenacity of language to serve our object, to bend it to every possible necessity to which the translator is thrown display no ordinary degree of patience and thought. Although the attempts to imitate the graceful negligence of poetry has been ill-followed by success, yet we can safely declare that the author has not been ruthlessly murdered.

There has to this day been a desideratum in the literature of Bengal. It was yet to be supplied. The epic poems of old had not been translated. The versified translation of Kassiram Doss although popular, was not entitled to find a place in the classic literature of Bengal. Every Hindoo knows by heart the various acts of the heroes of the *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan*, but they are known through old dame gossip and more as a traditional relic of old, than as a subject of study.

The bards who are now employed to expound these books to pious old men, distort or suppress every fact and add new matter, just as it suits their fancy or as they believe to make out a prettier story and unblushingly declare that their province is only to please or create an effect on the minds of their audience. There has been no attempt to enrich the vernacular by a chaste translation of these great poems. The *Surbartho Purnachandroday* is still in the shape of a magazine. Its object is too vast to be completed in a short course of time. When these snatches of translation will find themselves in a regular book, it will of course be a glorious achievement. But the prospect is too pleasing to be realised ere long. The *Mahabharat* by Kassyram Doss is little short of a failure. In search of rhyme he generally loses sense, and hesitates not to sacrifice sense to sound. And yet this book is generally read. Females and old men are particularly fond of this work. The *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan* are indeed very popular, but unfortunately there was no good translation in the language. This has at last been supplied. Babu Kali Prossunno's labors have now put us in possession of a book which even were its merits much less, would not have



failed to please the public. The unfeigned delight we felt was more than a dry compensation for the labor of perusal. The book before us forms one part of the work ; it embraces as far as the anecdotes of Sacontala. The completion of the work will, we are sure, add something to the permanent literature of Bengal. The volume before us is just the book for a quiet corner. It has all the merits of an original composition. It does not display the embarrassment of one who has to follow his master nor the impudent boldness of one who though bound to follow exhibits a show of awkward independence. The style at once manifests a refined taste, a cultivated understanding and a lively sense of propriety. The diction is elegant and must have been formed after the best models. The translation is correct and exquisitely finished. It combines with admirable taste the pathos of the Sanskrit with the elegance and artistic beauty of the vernacular. It carries with it the rare merit of being neat without stiffness, bold without grandeur. The attempt is altogether successful. The translator introduces his work with a well-written preface. He there deplores the neglect of his countrymen in learning the Sanskrit, and declares that his object for the

translation of the great poem was, that the beautiful epic of old should come home to every individual unacquainted with the Sanskrit. Whatever expectation the reader may form of the attractions of this work from the preface, it will fall far short of the realization which will attend upon an inspection of the work itself. We do not hesitate to declare that this is a good book. We expect the appearance of the other parts of the work possessing equal claims to our approbation. We cannot but regard this publication in the light of a national work, and in that character it appears to possess strong claims to a national reception. It is distributed gratis to those who would like to read, and we recommend our readers to avail themselves of this opportunity of being better able to form an acquaintance with the works of Vyasa. We had an intention of entering into the details of the beauties and defects of this work, (for defects it has) but we fear we have exceeded the limits we originally prescribed to ourselves. We return our hearty thanks to Babu Kali Prossunno for the pleasure his work has afforded us. We may now venture to predict that his work will long live to amuse and instruct its readers, and that the subsequent parts will possess as strong

a claim to our regard as the present volume has inspired."

On the completion of the work, Kristo Das Pal wrote as follows in the *Hindoo Patriot* of the 13th August, 1866 :—

"In the chequered career of Babu Kaliprossunno Sing the most cheering point has been the munificent patronage which he has extended to vernacular literature from we may say his early boyhood. Heir to an immense fortune he has dedicated it for the most part to the cause of letters. Young aspirants to literary fame have found in him a warm friend and supporter. To his patronage may be traced not a few original works and periodicals which now grace the vernacular library. But the Baboo himself has not a little enriched vernacular literature with his own labors. His *Hootompacha* marks an era in the history of fiction-writing in Bengalee. He has introduced a familiar and graphic style in drawing sketches from real life hitherto unknown among Bengalee writers. But the great work which above all signalizes his literary labours, and will connect his name imperishably with the progress of vernacular literature is his translation into Bengalee of the 18 volumes of Mahavaratha.

It is a work of which any man might justly be proud. We need hardly remind the native readers of this journal that the Mahavaratha and the Ramayana are the grandest epics in Sanscrit. The profoundest Oriental scholars have professed the highest admiration for them as monuments of poetic genius. Whether in sublimity or richness of thought, beauty of imagery, or grandeur of style, they are not surpassed by any other classic works of Europe or Asia. But the Mahavaratha is not simply a storehouse of poetic beauties and excellencies. In the absence of history it portrays intelligibly enough the manners and customs, and the social and political and religious systems of the Hindoos in the ancient times. From it we gather our ideas of the past, and form our conception of the greatness of our ancestors. The kings and heroes of whom the poet sings were not altogether myths. Their lives teach lessons of humanity, generosity, courage and devotion, which we will do well to treasure up in our minds and follow in the every day actions of our lives. The high moral instruction which the Mahavaratha inculcates is indeed held in such great reverence by our countrymen that they consider it an act of piety to hear it

chanted. To this day the recitations of the Mahavaratha are observed as a religious performance. Among the masses it has been popularized by the simple and sweet verses of Kasiram, written as it is believed about 200 years ago. There is not a ryot in the country who has learnt to read but who does not seek religious solace in the pages of the Mahavaratha. There is generally a reader in the villages in the Muffossil, who after the day's work is done, reads in the evening to crowded audiences the sacred verses of Kasiram or Keertibas.

A work so popular, so revered, and so valuable as a literary treasure, ought not to have been suffered to remain as a sealed book to the student of vernacular literature except in the vulgar garb which the unhewn genius of Kasiram had woven. The attention of the first Bengalee writer of the day was early drawn to this desideratum. About ten years ago Pundit Eswar Chunder Vidyasagar began to translate the Mahavaratha into Bengalee, and the first few instalments were published in the *Tuttobodhinee Puttrica*, of which he was then one of the directors. But owing to diverse engagements he could not proceed with the translation with the desired despatch, and he



readily consented to withdraw when Babu Kali Prossunno Singh expressed a desire to undertake this gigantic work. Buoyed up with a zeal, which never for a moment flagged, and with vast resources at his command, the Baboo has completed within 8 years what might fairly occupy the whole life-time of a man. One of the greatest difficulties which stood in his way was that of obtaining accurate texts. He however procured texts from the most reliable sources, *viz.*, from the Asiatic Society, from Rajah Radhakant Bahadoor, and from the libraries of the late Baboo Ashutosh Dey, as well as of Baboo Joteendra Mohun Tagore. He had also an old text in his own house, which his great grand-father Dewan Santiram Sing had brought from Benares. He received material assistance from Pundit Taranath Vidyaratna in reconciling the different texts and solving the doubtful passages. He employed a large staff of Pundits to assist him in the translation. Of these ten died before the work was brought to completion, and four are now living to share with him in the glory of executing this great national undertaking. The Baboo offers his acknowledgments to the undermentioned gentlemen for valuable suggestions and other

assistance while the work was in progress, viz., Pundit Eswar Chunder Vidyasagar, Pundit Gungadhar Turkobagish, Rajah Komul Krishna, Baboos Jotindra Mohun Tagore, Rajendralaul Mitter, Rajkrishna Banerjea, Pundit Dwarkanath Vidyabhusun, Editor of the *Shomeprokash*, Pundit Khetter Mohun Bhattacharjea, Editor of the *Bhaskur*, Baboo Nobin Krishna Banerjea, late Editor of the *Tuttobodhinee Puttrica* and Baboo Denobundhoo Mitter, author of the *Nil Durpan* drama &c. We believe 3,000 copies of each volume of the work were printed and they were all distributed *gratis*. Application for copies of the work came to him from distant parts of the country, while learned Pundits in person waited on the Baboo for the same. There was not a seat of learning in Bengal which did not welcome with delight each successive number as it issued from the press. Rajah Radhakant, that veteran scholar, and venerable patriarch of Indian Society on the issue of each volume, caused it to be read to him every evening as combining divine service with literary recreation. The literary merits of the translation are very high. The texts have been faithfully followed and gracefully rendered. The diction is in keeping with the

stateliness of the subjects, and although different hands worked there is no discordance. All the volumes attest the touches of the practised hand of the Editor-in-chief, we mean the Baboo himself. The work has been very appropriately dedicated to her gracious Majesty the Queen.

When the history of the rise and progress of Bengallee literature will come to be written Baboo Kali Prossunno Singh will undoubtedly occupy a high place in the gallery of the literary characters of the present period. In the magnitude of the work which he has achieved he is only equalled by Rajah Radhakant Bahadoor, whose Sanscrit encyclopædia is a monument of his scholarship and literary labors. But one is in the yellow sear of life, while the other is in the full bloom of youth. But both have established an equally undying claim to the gratitude of the country. On the completion of the gigantic work of the Rajah, an expression of national feeling was conveyed to him, and is it not meet that a similar honor should greet Baboo Kali Prossunno Singh for the successful accomplishment of the noblest design of his literary ambition?"

We have not been able to ascertain if any address was presented to Kali Prossunno as

suggested above but there can be no doubt that Kristo Das Pal only voiced the grateful feelings of the public.

Pundit Ramgati Nyayratna says in his excellent history of Bengali Language and Literature that Kali Prossunno's *Mahabharat* is regarded and appreciated as a model of simple and lucid translation.

The late Mr. R. C. Dutt, C.I.E., in his *Literature of Bengal* observes :

"The patriotic zemindar Kali Prossunno Singha also wrote a satirical sketch on modern society called *Hutum Pechar Naksha* but he has done more lasting service to the cause of Bengali literature and modern progress by his meritorious translation of the Sanscrit *Mahabharata* into Bengali prose. The work had been translated into Bengali by the Pundits of the Maharaja of Burdwan some years before, but Kali Prossunno Singha's translation is simpler and more literal, and is more acceptable to the public. He employed a number of Pundits to make this translation and widely distributed the work, free of cost among those who took an interest in the ancient epic.



Kali Prossunno Singha's *Mahabharata* and Hem Chandra Vidyaratna's *Ramayana* are the best prose translations of these epics in the Bengali language."

It is our firm conviction that in the whole range of Bengali literature there is not to be found another work of translation which can be compared with Kali Prossunno's *Mahabharat* in point of grace, elegance and perspicuity of style, and faithfulness to the original ; that so long as Bengali language endures the work shall go on growing in popularity from day-to-day and that so long as the Hindu religion exists, it shall continue to bring hope to the despairing, and peace to the afflicted, and the heavenly balm of faith and love of God to the wavering minds of countless millions of men and women from age to age.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### LAST DAYS. CHARACTER.

The translation of the *Mahabharat* was completed in 1856. Kali Prossunno survived the publication of this monumental work by only four years. His munificent charities and contributions to all movements for the public good ultimately involved him in debt. As already stated the publication and distribution of the *Mahabharat* alone cost him about two and a half lakhs of rupees. It appears from old files of the *Shomeprakash* that he also began publishing for free distribution among Sanscrit scholars the original *Mahabharat* and other ancient Sanscrit works. Owing to the constant strain on his purse he had to dispose of his extensive zemindaries in Orissa and valuable properties like the Bengal Club of Calcutta. Some of his relatives and friends in whom he had reposed great confidence also proved false and he lost a great part of his property through their dishonesty. It is sad to record that he could not pass his last days in perfect peace and quiet.

His only solace during the closing years of his life was the study of ancient Sanscrit works.

Shortly before his death he was engaged in writing a novel called *Bangesh Bijoy* as we learn from the Preface to Babu Pratapa Chandra Ghosha's famous novel—the *Bangadhip Parajay* which was dedicated to Kali Prossunno Singh. Unfortunately, however, Kali Prossunno died on the 24th July, 1870, corresponding to the 9th *Sravan*, 1277 Bengali Era at 3 p.m. leaving the work incomplete—only a portion of it having been sent to the Press.

Kali Prossunno left no children. After his death his widow adopted Babu Bejoy Chunder Singh—a son of the late Babu Bollye Chunder Singh in the *Dattaka* form. It is Babu Bejoy Chunder who is now managing the *Hindoo Patriot*—once so dear to Kali Prossunno—and by his various benefactions and public charities he is keeping the memory of Kali Prossunno green.

In the history of Bengali literature, the name of Kali Prossunno deserves to be recorded in characters of gold. Pundit Krishna Kamal Bhattacharyya says in his *Reminiscences* recorded by Professor Bepin Behari Gupta—"On looking back to early Bengali literature we find that Kali Prossunno Singh occupies a *very high place*."

The learned editor of the *Viswakosh* writes :

“The Bengali language has been very much benefited by Kali Prossunno Singh’s *Mahabharat* and the *Hutum Panchar Naksha*. The value of the benefit which the language has derived from the *Mahabharat* is simply incalculable. To *Hutum* we owe the coinage of some new Bengali words, the change in the style of dialogues in novels and dramas, and in the mode of describing natural scenery and some witty sayings in common use in our social intercourse. *Hutum* is the first and best satirical work in Bengali literature.”

Rajah Benoy Krishna Deb says in his *History of the Growth of Calcutta*:

“It is impossible to withhold high praise for the efforts of the late Baboo Kali Prossunno Singha of Jorasanko in the field of Bengali language and literature. It was at his instance and under his immediate supervision, the grand epic, the *Mahabharat* was translated into Bengali. Perhaps hardly any Bengali translation has yet appeared which can be compared to Kali Prossunno Singha’s edition in point of faithfulness and purity and dignity of style. Such men as the late Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and several other eminent Pandits and scholars looked after its proper translation and accuracy. It is difficult

to estimate the never-to-be-forgotten services which this noble-spirited gentleman rendered to the Bengali language. Unfortunately the Bengali language is yet a sealed book to Western *savants*, otherwise it is certain that his labours would have met with due recognition. To serve the Bengali language in those days required an amount of patriotism and disinterested self-sacrifice which few are capable of. He is therefore entitled to the deep gratitude of his countrymen."

The style of the *Mahabharat* still stands as a model for imitation by all writers of pure and classical Bengali—while that of *Hutum* is the language of our daily conversation, and in both these styles Kali Prossunno showed a mastery which has rarely been equalled by any other writer. We have already stated that some people are loth to believe that any credit is due to Kali Prossunno for the style of the *Mahabharat*—which was mainly the work of Pundits but there is ample evidence to prove that the uniformity of the style is due to the finishing touches given by Kali Prossunno himself to the translations made by others. As an illustration in support of our contention that the style was Kali Prossunno's own, we would refer our readers to the *Appendix* to the Bengali

edition of this work where we have reprinted an impassioned address by Kali Prossunno to his countrymen on the occasion of the death of Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee, the illustrious Editor of the *Hindoo Patriot*.

It is no doubt true that the *Mahabharat* and the *Hutum Panchar Naksha* are the noblest monuments of Kali Prossunno's genius, but we must not forget that in another branch of literature he has a good claim to recognition as a successful writer. We mean the Bengali Drama—his efforts for the improvement of which have already been dwelt upon in a preceding chapter. His work in this direction was highly spoken of by the Rev. J. Long, Kissory Chand Mittra and others who took a deep interest in the development of our national literature.

In the field of journalism also, Kali Prossunno occupies a conspicuous place. He it was who published the *Sarbasubhakari* in 1854 and edited the *Bibidhartho Sangraha* and the *Paridarshak* which greatly benefited our country and our country's literature.

Kali Prossunno was very fond of music and his exertions for the improvement of Hindu music are also worthy of being recorded. He



composed several songs himself and set them to music. Our great dramatist and actor, the late Babu Giris Chandra Ghosh was a great admirer of Kali Prossunno and we find that he composed a few songs which were set to the tune of some songs of Kali Prossunno.

We gather from an article which appeared in the second volume of the *Punya* over the signature of the late Babu Hitendra Nath Tagore—that Kali Prossunno established a musical society named *Sangit Samaj* at his own residence for the encouragement and improvement of Hindu music and that he invented a new kind of *Tambura* in which the hollow was made of strong paper instead of a gourd. The writer adds that all adepts in Hindu music owe him a debt of gratitude for this invention and that as much credit is due to Kali Prossunno for this invention in the musical world as for his translation of the *Mahabharat* in the literary world.

In his postscript to the *Mahabharat* he wrote :—

“In this great country—Bharatbarsha—many mighty and puissant sovereigns have constructed extensive roads, excavated large tanks and built

inaccessible fortresses, but all these shall pass away into the grim jaws of time and leave not a trace behind. How many countries—once rich and prosperous—have been converted into wildernesses—or have disappeared in the beds of rivers ! So it seems that every monument of greatness is liable to destruction except books which attest intellectual greatness. For books remain as long as the language exists and appear ever new to new generations of men.” We have no doubt that the works left by Kali Prossunno bearing the hall-mark of his genius will remain a lasting monument of his greatness.

As we have already observed, the greatness of Kali Prossunno rests not merely on his love of literature but on the higher pedestal of his love for his country. He was a leader in every movement set on foot for the good of his country. We have ample proofs of his great sympathy with all agitations for social reform such as the introduction of widow marriage and the suppression of Polygamy. We glean from old files of the *Sambad Prabhakar* that he offered a prize of one thousand rupees to the first Hindu who should come forward to marry a widow. He also sympathised with the efforts of *Maharshi*

Debendra Nath Tagore and the *Tattwabodhinee Sabha* (of which Kali Prossunno was a prominent member) to bring about social and religious reforms in our country. Although he could not repress a desire to ridicule the Brahmos and to have a fling at Debendra Nath Tagore himself whom he called "Pope Debendra Nath Tagore *the first*," he was not opposed to the Brahmo movement in reality. But though he was thus liberal in his views and sympathies in the matter of social reforms, he was strongly opposed to denationalisation. Although his mind was illuminated with the light of western knowledge, he was always anxious to preserve the spirit of nationalism. He always followed oriental ideals. The first band of Bengalees who had received English education were too prone to imitate Englishmen in all respects. Kali Prossunno was also given to imitation but not of Englishmen but of the highest class of Brahmin Pundits of the type of the great Vidyasagar. He loved to attend public meetings in native dress. He had a keen eye on the improvement of agriculture &c., in this country. We have already alluded to his essay on agriculture read at a Hare Anniversary Meeting. He took an active part in making the

agricultural exhibition held under the auspices of Sir Cecil Beadon in 1864, a success.

Kali Prossunno's candour, simplicity, joviality and other social qualities gathered round him a large circle of friends from every rank of society. It is impossible to name all his friends. He mixed freely with all classes of men. His love of his friends was genuine and sincere. He was shrewd enough to distinguish false friends from the true but his strong affection for those whom he had once admitted to his friendship often made him repose confidence in men who were unworthy of it. For this reason he came to be regarded as imprudent and thoughtless.

Kali Prossunno was always open-handed in his charities. We have already given our readers some idea of their nature and extent in the preceding pages. His gifts were always disinterested and never meant for winning applause. As a further instance of his charitable disposition we may mention an anecdote related by Babu Jyotirindra Nath Tagore in an article in the *Probasi* for Magh, 1318, B.E. Once on a time there was a famine somewhere in the North-West. A meeting was held at the Adi Brahma Samaj Hall on the occasion. Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore made

a stirring appeal to the gentlemen present for relief of the distressed people. The speech was a most telling one. Kali Prossunno who happened to be present at the meeting was so moved that he unwound his valuable shawl from his own person and made a present of it then and there to the Relief Fund. This shows the stuff of which Kali Prossunno was made and the generous impulses which actuated him whenever there was a cry of distress from suffering humanity.

It is impossible to delineate in detail all the good traits in Kali Prossunno's character. Suffice it to say that they won for him love and respect from all his countrymen during the brief period of his life and that the good work done by him earned for him an undying reputation and the memory of it shall live to inspire generations of Bengali youths and prompt them to do noble deeds.

A writer in the *Shomeprokash* wrote shortly after his death : "He was an ocean of generosity and a mine of charity. This is why he supported the cause of the tenant though he was himself a zemindar. \* \* \* He was a foe of double-dealing and ostentation. \* \* \* He was a model for imitation as regards his devotion to his



mother, his benevolence and his charitable disposition."

Kali Prossunno was not, however, without faults, as what man is? But we think it quite unnecessary to refer to them here. For the nobler qualities of his head and heart have entirely hidden from sight the blemishes in his character which very few men of his age and station in life were free from in those days. Kristo Das Pal rightly observed :

"But beneath the troubled waters of youth there was a silvery current of geniality, generosity, good-fellowship and highmindedness, which few could behold without admiring. With all his faults Kali Prossunno was a brilliant character and we cannot adequately express our regret that a career begun under such glowing promises should have come to such an abrupt and unfortunate close."

The waves of the ocean of time have already washed away the memory of the faults and weaknesses of Kali Prossunno's character. But his noble virtues shine forth resplendent with a glory that shall never fade. He lives in our mind as an embodiment of the spirit of patriotism, self-sacrifice, love of literature and reverence for the

teachings of the Shastras. Let us take inspiration from his noble example and gather new strength and enthusiasm for the furtherance and accomplishment of those noble ends and aims which actuated him in his short but glorious career.

Truly has the poet sung—

“We live in deeds, not years ; in thoughts,  
not breaths ;

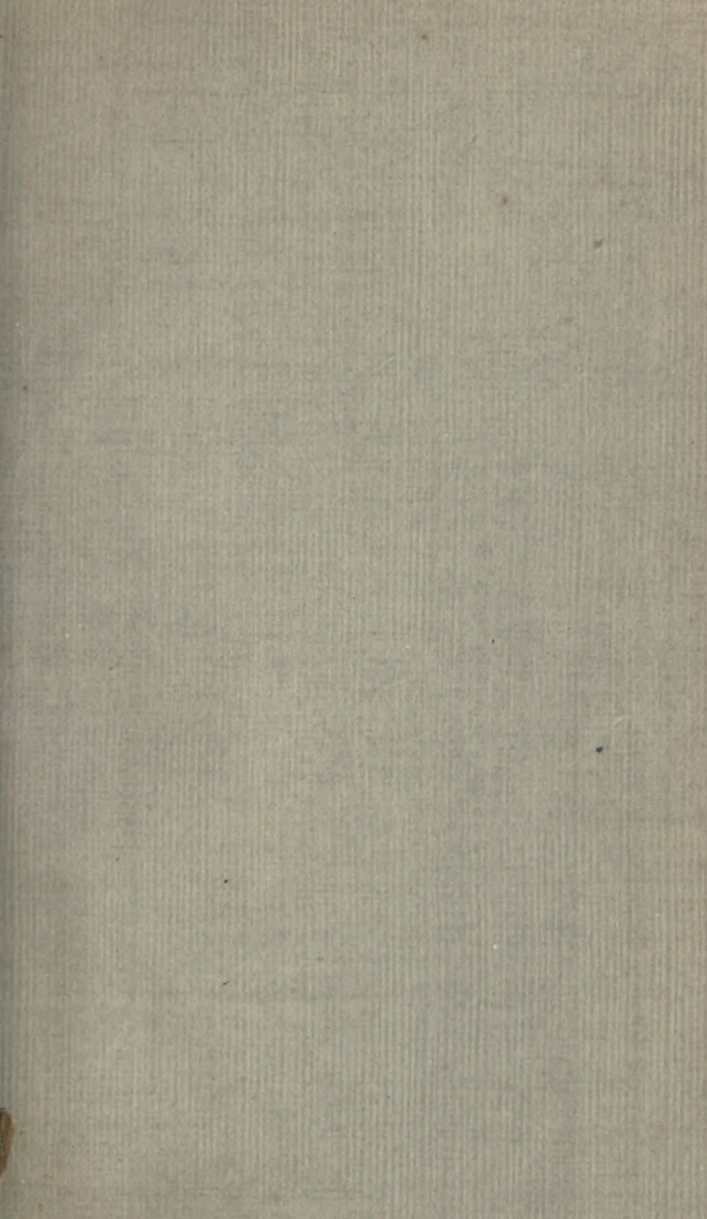
In feelings, not in figures on a dial,  
We should count time by heart-throbs. He  
most lives  
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.”

When we contemplate the career of Kali Prossunno we cannot help being struck with the versatility of his powers and the many-sidedness of his activities. And when we remember the short span of his life and think of the rich heritage he has left behind him to his countrymen in his literary productions, we are led irresistibly to the conclusion that he was a man of genius of a high order. Had he lived to a ripe old age we doubt not that he would have won the very highest rank not only as a man of letters but also as a leader of men. But unhappily for Bengal, such men are rarely blessed with long life and our record of the last fifty years bristles with instances of men

of great promise and the highest genius who have been snatched away in the prime of manhood.

We could not better conclude this short and necessarily imperfect memoir than by quoting the closing words of the postscript to the *Mahabharat* written by Kali Prossunno himself :

“May the rich and powerful men of our country engage with heart and soul in the work of ameliorating the condition of our motherland and thus putting their wealth to its proper use, win for themselves eternal glory and fame. May the odour of their reputation fill the whole world. May the pure light of knowledge expel the darkness of ignorance that has settled in the minds of the people. May the prosperity of India, so long enveloped in the gloom of adversity, grow from day-to-day like the phases of the Moon. May the good men who delight in literature spend all their days in peace and quiet and in the enjoyment of our national literature, and may hundreds of poets, authors and translators be born in our country to beautify our mother-tongue with the brightest ornaments and win immortal glory by captivating the hearts of the enlightened public.”







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